

Editorial

Why do we need preachers?

'How can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?' (Rom. 10:14-15)

These words of Paul tell us something of the life-changing nature of God's Word. Preaching declares the mind of God and thus preaching demands a response. Yet so often this is not the experience. Many claim to be committed to it but their diaries tell a different story as administration, visits, counselling, committees and similar activities prove more popular and often seem to be more effective. In this editorial I want to say four things about why we need preachers and five things about dangers faced by preachers themselves. Paul's questions encapsulates these two emphases: the first is that hearing the Word of God is the essence of preaching, and the second that those who preach need to bring their message from God himself.

We need to keep our nerve and not allow the good to become the enemy of the best nor the urgent to drown the voice of the eternal. We live in a consumer society and our churches are often run like supermarkets where the emphasis is on pleasing the customer. Recognition, good and right in itself,

of the ministry of the whole people of God leads to sharing, discussion and a focus on small groups rather than proclamation. In a world dominated by image and the internet we lose confidence in the living Word of God and retreat from preaching. Of course we need to understand our world and relate to people where they are, but we must never confuse that with bringing them into a living contact with God through the Word which is able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Let me suggest four reasons why expository preaching is needed more than ever.

1. It is the method which is least likely to stray from Scripture

When the Bible is opened, read and expounded God's voice is heard. He is the Teacher, and the preacher must listen to what he is saying and communicate that message with faithfulness and sensitivity to others. The whole Bible is needed: every book, every type of literary genre, and the best way to ensure that people hear it is to work systematically through it. Jim Packer describes the Bible as 'God preaching' and so our task as preachers is not to have new insights, but a faithful expounding

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of an infallible revelation. This revelation Paul describes as 'the pattern of sound teaching... the good deposit' (2 Tim. 1:13-14) which is to be 'guarded'. That does not mean kept locked away but rather the opposite: proclaimed everywhere. This is to continue in every generation and to be 'entrusted to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others' (2 Tim. 2:2). This is to happen 'in season' and 'out of season', and this means whether it is wanted or not. Indeed the less it is wanted, the more it is needed. The Bible is God's revelation and our preaching must faithfully communicate this without adding to it or subtracting from it. The Bible must be received like the manna, that is fresh(ly) every day. We cannot live on the rapidly diminishing biblical capital of earlier generations. Every generation needs the whole Bible expounded and applied, and true preaching is the indispensable foundation for this to happen.

2. It is the best way to avoid the preacher's hobby horses

All preachers have pet themes, and while we can be fairly adept at finding these almost everywhere, we are more likely to ride hobby horses if we major on thematic or topical preaching than if we major on expository preaching. Expository preaching will make us tackle passages of Scripture we would shy away from if we are simply looking for themes. For example, in my own ministry I have recently preached on 2 Samuel 21 and 1 Corinthians 5 as part of expository series. Look at these and ask yourselves if you would have preached on those if they were not part of a series. Yet, since all Scripture is the Word of God, these passages and many others have vital and fascinating truth for us. We need to tackle every part of the Bible and unfold its riches. We need to unfold the big picture and show how each part contributes to the whole. That does not mean we serve up huge slabs of background history and systematic theology. We need to work hard in the study so that these matters

What we need to do is to catch people and their problems up into worship of the greatness and wonder of God where in the light of his Word these other matters take their true place

become part of our thinking and our whole expression and presentation is biblical. This will also deliver us from the snares of a 'Bible-based ministry'. This sees the Bible as a 'resource', a kind of *trampoline* from which we bounce off with our own ideas. Perhaps *trampoline* is a bad metaphor because at least you regularly reconnect with your starting point.

'Bible-based' is often a euphemism for domesticating the Bible, searching it for 'relevant' texts which we then use as a starting point for our own speculations and advice. It is not our task to make the bible relevant, the Bible is relevant. Our task is to demonstrate that – not to create it. Ultimately 'Bible-based' thinking shows a distrust of the Bible as God's living and powerful Word speaking not only to its own time but to every time. Our preaching needs to be thoroughly biblical.

3. Expository preachers teach others to read the Bible

When it is well done, expository preaching creates a hunger for the Bible and a desire to explore it further. Good preaching will not leave people baffled and thinking, 'What a clever preacher – I could never do that.' Rather they will be thinking, 'I can do that myself', and the congregation will also begin to think biblically. They will find new depths and fascination in what they thought was familiar, e.g. parts of the Gospels, and they will be encouraged to read less familiar parts such as the prophets with some understanding. Preaching will place the Bible at the heart of the church's agenda and will foster a love of hearing the Word of God.

Two things will happen when expository preaching is done well. First, people will see the newness and freshness of texts they thought worn shiny with over-familiarity. As the Gospels, for example, are preached, the living Christ will be revealed in unmistakable and challenging ways. Second, people will gain confidence in less familiar parts of the Bible and start exploring books like the Song of Songs and Nahum, and find in them saving truth.

4. Expository preaching is God-centred and Christ-exalting

Preaching which is issue-centred will deal with the felt needs of particular people and particular times. It is always in danger of becoming moralising platitudes and of simply engaging emotion without real business being done in hearts and minds. We know that people suffer from stress at work and problems in relationships, struggle with temptations, long for intimacy and feel vulnerable. But what we need to do is to catch people and their problems up into worship of the greatness and wonder of God where in the light of his Word these other matters take their true place. This is not simply saying that God is great and Christ is Lord and hurrying on to other matters; rather the exposition of Scripture will continually focus our thoughts and minds on the many-splendoured glories of God. From that vantage point our human problems can be seen in their true light and real help given.

This is the high calling, and because of our limitations and weaknesses we

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need to look at various ways in which we can limit and even nullify the effect of expository preaching.

EXPOSITORY PREACHING

1. We must not collapse preaching into explanation

It is possible to expound orthodox doctrines with all the passion of someone reading train timetables, and to present the gospel as if it were like deciding on the relative merits of different insurance policies. We must engage deeply with the text and allow its dynamics to shape our preaching. We will bring out narrative flow, looking at plot, characterisation and setting, and try to convey something of its excitement. We will explore the imagery of poetry and how its effects are achieved. We will read the prophets with an ear for their special voice, and the parables with an openness to their challenges. This means that God's Word will truly be presented in our words as we submit not only to what the Bible says but to the way it says it.

2. We must not divorce preaching and worship

Preaching is a central part of worship because in it we hear the voice of the living God and are challenged to respond. This has to begin in the study. Have you never fallen on your knees, wept, laughed with joy and been overwhelmed by the power of the Word of God? When that happens in the study its fruits will be seen in the pulpit. Our

ideas about God are of no great significance. What matters is what God says about himself. And what matters in preaching is that it is God, not us, who is seen. This means constant reference to the text and open Bibles as we show people that the surpassing glory is of Christ and not of us. Preaching shows the glory of God from his Word and not from our imagination. Think, for example, of Isaiah 40 – read aloud and meditate on the great creation poem in vv. 12ff. and you will be overwhelmed. But such a God surely is too great to care for our little concerns. No, says Isaiah, he is not too great to care, he is too great to fail, and so the chapter ends with the God 'who gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak' (v. 29). Or again – think of 1 Corinthians 15 with its breathtaking exposition and unfolding of the Resurrection. We know Christ has risen not because 'he lives within my heart' but because he reigns over heaven and earth and has given notice to death that its time is running out and that our labour is not in vain. Of course, he lives within your heart, but what help is that when your heart is broken and crushed? It is the great truths of the gospel, preached in the power of the Spirit, which bring assurance and keep us running the race. Only great thoughts of God and a warm heart for his glory will create a spirit of worship which will honour Christ and transform people.

3. We must deal with real and not merely felt needs

If we allow felt needs to dominate our preaching we will soon stray from the gospel and end up unable to address

felt needs as well. Felt needs always clamour for attention. Real needs like conversion, holiness, growth in grace and Christlikeness will always suffer by comparison. We need to show in our preaching that felt needs such as relationships, stress, work, fulfilling potential and the like flow from our relationship with God and ultimately find no rest until they find it in him. All who preach regularly have had the experience of strangers asking how they knew about their private lives, so relevant was the Word of God.

There we learn dependence on the Spirit, trust the Bible to be the Bible and unleash the living Word into a world of hurt, fear, anger, temptation and sin and allow it to do its work. If we trust the Bible we find that there is saving and sanctifying truth everywhere. We will find that Esther with its picture of an unseen but powerful God speaks to those who themselves are searching for a God who seems to be absent. We will find that Nahum is the starting point on the journey of faith for some who had never before pondered God and the nations. All of the Bible is about real people and real needs because all of it is the Word of the living God speaking into the human situation. For this to happen the Word of God must speak to our own hearts. It is a particular danger for experienced preachers to find words coming too easily and we can speak of holiness without any relish for it; we can speak of the majesty of God without trembling before him; we can speak of his love without our hearts being moved. Our hearts need to be stirred by a noble theme (Ps. 45:1) and we need to eat the food we prepare for others and recognise the deep needs of our own hearts.

4. All our preaching must be expository

Over the years, like most of you, I have preached a number of series on thematic subjects – e.g. what it means to be human; the gifts of the Spirit; problems facing Christians and the like. But all these were expository sermons.

They were not verse by verse comments but the topics grew from the passages and were not imported into them. Exposition means that the content of our sermon unfolds the truth of the Bible, it does not refer to a particular style. Often, notably in Paul, verse by verse exposition will be appropriate as we tease out the argument. Normally in narrative, e.g. 1 & 2 Kings, we will be concerned to unfold the dynamics of the text and take longer passages. Sometimes we may unfold the essence of a book in one sermon. The size of the text is a matter of choice and judgment. Our responsibility as preachers is to open it up in such a way that its message is heard clearly, accurately and relevantly. The best way to ensure this is to have exposition of books as the staple fare of our preaching. Then we will avoid the monotony which comes from choosing a topic and looking for a passage to fit it. Each book is unique and faithfulness to its distinctive message will make for variety as well as authority in our preaching.

5. We must believe in the Holy Spirit

It is often said that as C.H. Spurgeon climbed the pulpit steps he said on every one, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit.' We need to have that not just as an article in the Creed, but a living conviction. This means that the inspirer of the Bible is also the one who takes our words and with all their imperfection uses them to open the written Word and lead to the living Word. This means that when our preparation is faithfully and diligently completed and we are ready to preach, we give what we are to say as an offering on the altar and ask the living Spirit to use it to glorify Christ. We are totally dependent on him, and without him we may speak in the tongues of men and of angels but will achieve nothing. We need to pray through the process of preparation and remember that the Spirit is also the enabler of those who hear: we need to recover the sense of expectation that the Spirit who inspired the Bible is also

at work in the preaching of the Word and the response of the hearers.

Keep on preaching, keep on praying, keep on believing that the Holy Spirit will use your words and thus lead to the living Word. Believe that Scripture is alive and trust it to do its appointed work.

'Come then with prayer and contemplation,
see how in Scripture Christ is known;
wonder anew at such salvation
here in these sacred pages shown;
lift every heart in adoration,
children of God by grace alone.'

Timothy Dudley Smith

Cohabitation and Marriage

Gordon Kennedy, Stranraer

This article is one of a series offered in response to an address by the Revd David Easton at the Crieff Fellowship in March 2005. We are rightly grateful to David for his careful and sensitive work in this area reflected in addresses to the Crieff Fellowship and an article in this Journal, (RJCM Vol. 1 No. 2 Winter 1994). Those of us in parish ministry know the tensions that arise when presented with a request for marriage from a couple who are cohabiting. This is a situation that will not now diminish but, for many, has become and will remain the norm. It is essential then that we face the questions such requests bring before us.

David has over the years described a policy, endorsed by his Kirk Session, which has been adopted and operated in other parishes. Simply put, the policy was that on presentation of a request for marriage by a cohabiting couple they would be asked either to marry as soon as possible and that within one year, or to agree to live apart until their chosen date for the wedding service. David has described four effects of seeking consistently to operate this policy: (1) requests for weddings fell away, (2) there

was hurt and anger, (3) the couple left unhappy and (4) parents of the couple, especially those with a church connection, were often very angry about a refusal from the minister to conduct a wedding. The outworking of the policy was wholly negative: no couples responded positively, families were alienated from the church and contact with the church was lost and broken. As one who has tried to follow such a policy in my parishes I recognise all of these responses and can offer no positive experiences to set against them. I am sure that I am not alone in this.

Cohabitation

In a helpful article on cohabitation in the *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* G. J. Jenkins offers as a definition of cohabitation 'any unmarried heterosexual couple who consistently share a common residence and regularly engage in sexual intercourse'. (NDCEPT¹ s.v. 'Cohabitation'). Cohabitation is not only when a couple engage in sexual intercourse, but also when they share a common address.

We can compare this with the defi-

nition of marriage offered in the same Dictionary by J. H. Olthuis: 'Marriage is a mutual, exclusive, life-long, one-flesh union between a husband and wife characterized by troth. *Troth* is an Old Eng. word for fidelity, truth, trust, love and commitment.' (NDCEPT s.v. 'Marriage'). It is not difficult to imagine, and we may know of couples who cohabit for a lifetime displaying all these characteristics of marriage without ever marrying. The difference between cohabitation and marriage is recognised by Olthuis when he writes of the relationship between marriage, state and church:

By means of a marriage licence (and bill of divorce), the State legally acknowledges the birth (and death) of a marriage. By means of a public blessing, the church community recognizes the marriage and pledges support. A wedding rite is a celebrative ceremony in which a couple, sharing their joy and seeking support, publicly pledge their troth in the presence of family, friends, church, State and God.

A cohabiting couple are publicly exhibiting their relationship. What they are not doing is recognising the role of the State to regulate such human relationships. Of course we are now moving into a situation where legally the State will recognise cohabiting couples for tax and inheritance purposes, which raises the question, what, in the thinking of our Government, is the difference between cohabitation and marriage?

At the heart of this difference between marriage and cohabitation is then the involvement of the State, or perhaps a recognition by a cohabiting couple that their relationship is not merely their own business but does involve the whole community. We may trace the steps from the starting point that each party to a marriage must freely consent to this union, to 'I will marry/live with whoever I want and it is none of your business', to an overthrow of any role for the community in which this couple now lives. This privatisation of sexual relations is a further instance of the privatisation of truth, opinion and emotions. From the time of the Reformation we have given to the State the responsibility of recognising a couple as husband and wife. A couple cannot declare themselves, nor can a church service on its own declare a couple to be husband and wife. Surely this has implications for our understanding of marriage and Christian marriage.

A cohabiting couple cannot be considered as husband and wife. Even in the situation of the one remaining form of irregular marriage, once a couple have applied to the appropriate court for their relationship to be recognised, it is recognised as becoming a married relationship between a husband and wife. What is irregular is that no public ceremony has taken place. The pattern for the expression of our human sexuality revealed in the Scriptures is between a husband and wife. In our sex-obsessed society we rightly give thanks to God that he has regulated human sexuality within the covenant of marriage. Any exercise of

human sexuality outwith the covenant of marriage is sinful, both falling short of the standard and crossing the limits set for us by our God. For those who have been wounded by adultery from within marriage and short-lived relationships that never became marriage, we must teach the judgment of God upon those who wilfully disobey his commands, and the grace of God towards those victims of the all-too-common sexual promiscuity of our times.

We are right then to teach marriage as God's ideal for men and women who seek to live in an intimate and sexual relationship. Cohabitation does not and will never meet this standard God calls us to.

To marry, or not to marry?

What then are we to do when approached by a cohabiting couple seeking to be married?

Under the policy described above a couple admitting to living at the same address would be presented with two options: marry as soon as possible or live apart until the wedding. Experience shows that this results in the couple seeking the services of another minister or civil registrar. In our denomination where the exercise of discipline upon ministers is at best lax or at worst non-existent, there will always be another minister willing to perform a wedding service without considering the pastoral implications of another minister previously having been approached by a couple. As people who believe the warnings of the Bible that God will not fail to punish sin that is not covered by the blood of the Lord Jesus, to see such a couple turning away without considering the dangers of their standing before the Lord can only cause us deep pain. Will such a couple ever hear the gospel? Will they form the opinion of the church, the gospel, the Lord as always saying 'No'? Are we to be found guilty of not helping those weak and in need of the liberating truth of Christ's grace? Whatever Mike Parker writes of

the opportunities for evangelism at the time of a wedding, we will never need them with this couple!

The constant problem with consistency

In his address at Crieff David rightly reminds us that consistency is important, but also difficult. If a couple come seeking marriage and tell us they are living separately are we naïve to believe them? It is surely not right for us to become investigators snooping around trying to find out if they are living together, or perhaps only at the weekends or just while on holiday together. However, if we have made a firm and public stand on not marrying cohabiting couples unless they fall in with our policies we may in fact be making laughing stocks of ourselves as the community with glee notes how easily we are taken in. We will also make rods for our backs to be wielded by angry parents who know about the living arrangements of couples we have married while refusing to marry their daughter.

This, of course, does not begin to touch the situation of a couple maintaining separate addresses who are sexually active before marriage. This is not cohabitation and is not covered by the policy described above and only a direct question to the couple would address such a concern. But is it reasonable for a minister to put such a direct question to every couple? How would their response be judged? The opportunities to cause offence here are legion. And yet, are we to find ourselves without question marrying couples who are sexually active but not cohabiting yet refusing to marry those openly, and it might be argued by many today, more honestly cohabiting?

Marriage and forgiveness

In the title track of the album *The River* Bruce Springsteen sings of a young couple where the girl falls pregnant and then 'We went down to the courthouse, and the Judge put it all to rights'.

Is this how we think of marriage?

The phrase 'making an honest woman of me/her' is one that has passed into common usage. The thinking behind this phrase is that a couple have been sexually active or cohabiting and that this is dishonest, but now that they are being married their relationship becomes honest. Whatever wrong there has been in the past is now put right by the act of getting married. Is this what we want to teach about forgiveness? Is this not a form of works righteousness? By what theological means have we removed the cross from this couple's life that they might find atonement in an act of their own will and power?

Surely we need to be more honest and courageous with couples. Getting married does not 'make it right'. Only the blood of Jesus covers sin before a holy God. This gospel message must be proclaimed or else we are comforting sinners in one area of their lives with their own works and expecting them to depend upon grace in others; no wonder so few believe the gospel!

So far as the State is concerned a public marriage ceremony and the issuing of a marriage certificate regularises an existing relationship and in this sense alone we may say that marriage 'makes it right'. However, we should be careful in using this language as couples will readily and gladly misunderstand and think that we are talking about Christian forgiveness and making it right with God.

Our marriage preparation classes must be used as evangelistic opportunities; we must 'hear' a couple asking to be married as though they were saying to us 'please tell us the gospel'. Where a couple tell us of their cohabitation or non-cohabiting sexual activity we must faithfully minister the grace of God and the call to repentance and faith as the only way they may be forgiven.

And yet this must be done in the context where marriage is better than non-marriage, even for non-Christians. We should teach all people the blessings and benefits of marriage even if they are not willing to repent of any

former sin or to recognise their cohabitation as sin.

When is marriage a Christian marriage?

Increasingly I think this is a crucial question that has been badly answered in the past.

Let me try to clarify the question: Is Christian marriage a marriage which begins with a Christian service in a church building conducted by a Christian minister, or is Christian marriage a marriage contracted between a Christian couple? We teach that it is lawful for all people to marry (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 24:3). This must include Christians and non-Christians. What do we mean by describing a marriage service, however properly conducted by a minister, as being Christian marriage?

The analogy with funeral services is apt. Often a parish minister will be called upon to conduct a funeral service for a parishioner whose life-style was far from Christian, and yet such services are regularly conducted without the heart-searching or questioning that we find ourselves mired in with marriage services. Is a funeral service a Christian service because it is conducted by a Christian minister, or because the person being buried or cremated is Christian? It may be best to conclude that this is a lazy use of language. Yes, the service may be conducted according to the traditions and customs of the Church of Scotland, or whatever Christian tradition the minister follows, but there is no question of the nature of the service affecting the Christian standing of the person who has died.

A Christian life is lived by a person committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. A Christian funeral, expressing a confident hope and the joy of salvation is conducted by a Christian minister when the deceased has died in faith, trusting in the Lord Jesus. Therefore, a Christian marriage is a relationship entered into by a Christian couple in dependence upon the Lord

Jesus and the presence of his Spirit, by which husband and wife may love one another as Christ loves them. The role of a Christian minister is to guide and prepare such a couple and to lead a service of public worship at which this couple pledge themselves to one another; at which service God's Word is read and prayer is offered for this new family unit. Where a couple are not Christian in preparation the minister has a duty (perhaps better an opportunity) to speak of the Christian life and the blessings there are in submitting to Jesus Christ as Lord in the context of becoming husband and wife. At the service the non-Christian couple will pledge themselves to one another, the minister may read and seek to apply God's Word and will pray for them – nevertheless this will be a different worship service from that engaged in by a Christian couple.

Surely here our understanding of the Church of Scotland as a parish church and her ministers as parish ministers is important.

In the *Articles Declaratory* of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in *Matters Spiritual* the third article is recognised to be the Church of Scotland's self-definition of what we seek to be as the national church of the people of Scotland. It is worth quoting in full:

III. This Church is in historical continuity with the Church of Scotland which was reformed in 1560, whose liberties were ratified in 1592, and for whose security provision was made in the Treaty of Union of 1707. The continuity and identity of the Church of Scotland are not prejudiced by the adoption of these Articles. As a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.

Of interest here is the final phrase about the ordinances of religion. These are understood to be marriage and burial according to the custom and

practice of the Church of Scotland, or sometimes referred to as Christian burial and Christian marriage.

At its best this Article is a missionary commitment to our nation; by exercising a parish or territorial ministry the Church is seeking to evangelise the people of Scotland. When we offer the services of a minister at times of marriage and death we are seeking to build relationships between the minister and those involved in receiving these ordinances of religion. We should hold firm to the distinction between sacramental ministry and the ministry of the ordinances of religion: sacramental ministry is for those expressing faith in Jesus Christ, the ordinances of religion are a missionary tool the church uses to make contact with the people of Scotland for their blessing and salvation.

If we are to offer our services, our ordinance of religion ministry only to those who exhibit Christian faith we are changing the nature of our duty in terms of Article III. There are other ways of being church and understanding our relationship to the nation, but this is the one we believe God has distinctively called us to within the Church of Scotland and until or unless it is changed or modified we should strive to minister within the context of this 'distinctive call and duty'.

It is in this context that the question of civil services is raised. Should we pursue with the Scottish Executive a policy that all wedding services should be conducted by the civil authorities with the possibility of a church blessing for those members or those who wish such a blessing? Although initially attractive such a proposal will move the concerns we have to another point: can we bless the marriage of a couple who this morning were cohabiting and have just left the Registrar's Office having completed their marriage schedule? If we can with good conscience do this, why can we not marry them? How many couples required to have a civil ceremony will leave it at that and never come near the church or a parish minister? And while we may think that meaningful contact is limited at times

of marriage there may at least be some which is better than none.

A way forward

Let me conclude with some suggestions towards a way forward.

1. It is better to be married than to cohabit. This is true for all people and the church should teach and encourage this being pro-marriage. The consequence of this is that when a couple in a cohabiting relationship approach us our desire must be for them to become married.

2. It is good to be invited to share in someone's life. A couple approaching us with a request for marriage are inviting us into one of the most significant events of their life. Often our attitude towards a request for marriage makes it clear that we do not appreciate this invitation. *The Code of Good Practice for the Conduct of Marriage Services* submitted to the General Assembly in 1997 states:

4. A minister agreeing to conduct a wedding should endeavour to establish a pastoral relationship with the couple within which adequate pre-marriage preparation and subsequent pastoral care may be given.

(*The Church of Scotland Year Book 2005/06*, p.68)

The burden to establish a good pastoral relationship lies with the minister. How much time do we spend preparing pre-marital classes? How often do we follow up the wedding day with a visit to the home? We have been invited in, are we going through this open door?

3. It is better for a couple to be married by a Christian minister than not. This is not about our services being better than a Registrar's or some snobbery about being married in church. A Christian minister will minister to, will serve, the couple in a godly and Christian way. They will be prayed for and with, they will be invited to become associated with the life of a worshipping congregation of

God's people, even when speaking of a rebellion against God and his ways the couple will be loved and encouraged to trust in God's grace through Christ. Every time a couple leave our vestries and do not return that is one more couple a step further away from hearing the gospel in a way they might positively respond to it.

4. Serving people without condoning sin. If we only offer to serve those who are without sin we will offer very few any kind of service at all. This is not about 'love the sinner but hate the sin', rather it is an attempt to recognise that we are offering Christian ministry to a sinful people. Can we conduct a wedding service for a couple who are cohabiting that reflects in an appropriate and gracious way the truth that their cohabiting is a falling short of God's purposes for them? In this edition of the *Journal*, Peter White is offering us some thoughts on the order of service for a wedding and how this may reflect the past cohabitation of the couple now being married.

You will have noticed that I have not answered the key question: should we or should we not perform wedding services for cohabiting couples? I hope however that this short article has outlined some of the issues involved in coming to an answer to this question. It is one that will not now go away. One thing we cannot afford is to throw stones at one another; some of us will decide to marry cohabiting couples, others will not. This should not be allowed to become some shibboleth of orthodoxy which divides us from one another and creates suspicion and distrust. Our calling to minister the gospel to the people of Scotland is hard enough without adding to our burdens. Let us rather agree prayerfully to consider the pattern of our ministry and in that same spirit to support and encourage one another – all the more where we disagree.

¹ NDCEPT – *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, Intervarsity Press, Leicester, 1995

Cohabiting couples:

modifying the wedding service

Peter White, Minister of Sandyford
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The question of modifying the wording of our wedding service is all of a piece with our relationship with the couple and the pastoral objectives which have been developing. Clearly therefore this section of the article should not be considered in isolation from the others (which I have not seen).

We are always aiming for people's salvation and the honour of Jesus Christ. With a couple who (for example) make no profession of faith and have children after years of cohabitation, our objectives are different from those where both parties profess the Faith. Likewise the task of the wording in the service is different if the couple are repentant, from that if they are unrepentant.

The wording finally chosen for the modification of the wedding service therefore depends on what we want it to achieve. The precise burden of that will be as various as the people we are serving, and those now suggested should be regarded as illustrations from a spectrum of possible wordings.

Our guide is 'What would Jesus do?' always aware that we shall be tempted to be either less straight than he or less kind, depending on our particular personality along with those of the couple, their families and the influence

these have in our congregation. There is admirable balance in our Lord's 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.' Surely we do wrong if we fail to stand up publicly for chastity before and outside marriage; surely we do wrong if we fail to offer a Saviour winsomely.

The four places where alternative wording may be introduced are the preface, the prayers, the vows and the address. I restrict myself to offering alternative modifications to the preface and the vows, so as to indicate the kind of variation I think called for if we are to reclaim faith and marriage for the next generation.

I take it for granted that during the preparation for the wedding we have made clear that a couple's cohabiting creates difficulty for a minister and that this has been explored openly and charitably (as far as in us lies!). We must not introduce a significant change in the service without prior warning and explanation.

Preface addendum no. 1

As we know, A and B have been living together for years. You would not expect me as a Christian minister to think that living together before marrying is God's best, and I do not.

God has made it clear in holy Scripture that sexual union is his wedding gift, intended to be opened only after a couple have publicly given themselves to each other as man and wife in life-long marriage.

In choosing to marry, therefore, A and B are regularising their relationship before God in a way which we respect and on which we seek God's blessing...

Preface addendum no. 2 *

God's design for marriage, which he made for the greatest happiness of men and women, is that life together and sexual union should start after the wedding.

To my great admiration, A and B, on discovering they were doing wrong in this, separated before coming to this day and have invited me to tell you so. This separation and coming fresh to the wedding service is a choice to honour God. We may be quite sure that he will honour those who have chosen to honour him in this way.

Preface addendum no. 3 *

God's design for marriage, which he made for the greatest happiness of men and women, is that sexual union

and life together should start after the wedding.

In the Bible God tells us that coming together in this way before marrying is wrong. I have said this because otherwise you might get the impression that the Church is not concerned about sex before marriage, and that we are failing to uphold God's standards.

Clearly a relationship like this creates difficulty for a minister. If he says nothing about it that may appear as approval; if he condemns, it sounds like a lack of compassion. But it is always good when a relationship is regularised before God, as A and B are now doing. I rejoice that they have decided to marry and to do so before God and in church.

Modified vows based on the vows in the first order of marriage, *1994 Book of Common Order* for the Church of Scotland.

In confirming our union in the presence of God and before these witnesses I, A....., give myself to you, B....., to be your husband, and take you now to be my wife. I promise to love you, to be faithful and loyal to you, keeping myself only to you as long as we both shall live.

In confirming our union in the presence of God and before these witnesses I, B....., give myself to you, A....., to be your wife, and take you now to be my husband. I promise to love you, to be faithful and loyal to you, keeping myself only to you as long as we both shall live.

The two changes are, first the introduction of the first four words; and secondly the wording I always import from the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer*. The first four words represent the fact that this couple have usurped God as to the act of union: they have already made themselves one flesh. The BCP addendum, 'keeping me only unto thee' or (as here) its modern equivalent,

constitute a public commitment to the exclusivity of marriage.

If such changes are introduced, I personally would be shy of any modification of the prayers: the matter has been dealt with. A repentant couple have been freely forgiven long before now, and it would be an abuse of prayer to use it as a closet sermon to the unrepentant.

Our objective is living faith attended by evangelical obedience. If we honestly do what we believe our Lord will smile on, in preference to fearing the consequences of causing offence, and if our manner is one of cheerful confidence in what is right rather than embarrassed apology for it, we shall surely find the right words.

* modified from Edward Pratt, *Living in Sin?*, St Simon's Church, Southsea, 1991.

New Tools for Effective Teaching

– the preaching manual of Guibert of Nogent

John B. Percival

One of the advantages of studying church history is that it dispels the notion that our contemporary generation ever really comes up with anything new. This is even true with reference to preaching. It comes as a great surprise to many people that the first book that we have on how to preach a good sermon comes from the pen of a young French monk called Guibert of Nogent sometime around 1080.¹

Guibert records in his autobiography² how when he was in his mid-twenties, he and his abbot visited a neighbouring monastery, and after hearing him preach, the prior exhorted him to write something that he might find useful for a sermon. Guibert threw himself into the project and the result was a moral commentary on the Book of Genesis prefaced by a short treatise on the way that a sermon ought to be given.

The background to Guibert's work was the eleventh century reformation – a flowering of religious devotion that included a massive proliferation in preaching. At the start of the eleventh century there were few sermons

and most of them were restricted to the cathedrals and cloisters on feast days and holidays. However, by the end of the eleventh century the situation was very different. Throughout Europe, preachers could be heard motivating others to go to the Holy Land on Crusade. Itinerant preachers of various stripes wandered the countryside advertising their religious wares and popular preachers preached to great crowds filled with devotion to their local saints.

Guibert's treatise reflects many aspects of this transformation in preaching. On the one hand, he bemoans the lack of good preaching in his own day, but yet on the other, his book is evidence of the spread of preaching – something that he wants to further encourage through his work.

Don't Keep Quiet: Preach!

Guibert is sharply critical of some of his fellow churchmen, especially those who are not fulfilling their responsibility to preach. Some, he says, have seen the arrogance of other preachers and refuse to preach lest they be dubbed 'sermonizers' and tarred with the same

brush. Others are just plain lazy and refuse to do the work of the Lord. Still others refuse to preach because they are worried that they won't look as good as the experts. Others preach merely to flaunt their own learning and eloquence, but Guibert says that in some ways this group is to be commended: it is better to preach from false motives than not to preach at all (Phil. 1: 18). It is possible to sin either by committing an evil act or by refusing to do good and many contemporary preachers, he feels, have fallen into the latter.

The Inner Life of the Preacher

The key to preaching a good sermon, for Guibert, is to be found in a contemplative life that is at peace with God. If you have a clear conscience and a good understanding of the material then you are more likely to be interesting and memorable. The preacher must make sure that the memory and guilt of his own sins do not blunt his effectiveness as a speaker. Preaching is the overflow of a heart that is on fire with love for God. Guibert suggests: 'Let a prayer always precede the sermon, so

A good sermon is like a diet of milk. It is familiar and necessary for small children but yet even old men dip their crusts of bread into it. It has something of nutritional value for everyone

that the soul may burn fervently with divine love; then let it proclaim what it has learned from God so as to inflame the hearts of all hearers with the same interior fire which consumes it. For a tepid sermon, delivered half-heartedly, cannot please even the preacher; wonder of wonders, then, if it should please anyone else.³

Long, boring sermons that expound obscure texts are irritating to Guibert, as is excessive material. He comments: 'Where a few ideas might have been presented effectively, a plethora of ideas presented at too great a length leads to apathy and even, I fear, to hostility.'⁴ He uses the illustration of food. In moderation it is good, but in excess it leads to vomiting. Likewise, many words may not be effective where a few will suffice. 'It is much better for them [the hearers] to hear a few things well-presented than a great many things from which they will retain almost nothing.'⁵ This advice, if followed, will have the additional effect that when the preacher comes to preach another sermon, his audience will be eager rather than resentful.

Something for Everyone

Guibert also grapples with how to preach to a congregation of people with varying degrees of understanding and intelligence. He says that the preacher ought to teach simple and uncomplicated matter to the unlettered but also ought to include material that appeals to those who are capable of deeper thought. A good preacher should also stretch the uneducated by making

difficult concepts palatable through the use of stories and good illustrations from everyday life. Guibert says that a good sermon is like a diet of milk. It is familiar and necessary for small children but yet even old men dip their crusts of bread into it. It has something of nutritional value for everyone. He summarises: 'We learn simple stories to please some, and we bring into the sermon the histories of old and we embellish our words like a painter using many different colours on the same canvas.'⁶

Using the Bible

Like almost all of his contemporaries Guibert adopted a method of biblical interpretation where each passage had four different levels of meaning – historical, allegorical, moral and anagogical. In a couplet cited by Nicolas of Lyre around 1330, 'The letter teaches the things that were done, the allegory what you should believe, the moral what you should do, the anagogical where you are headed.'⁷ A concept like Jerusalem, therefore, refers to the literal historical city, but might also be an allegory for the church. Morally, it might teach us about the soul of the faithful believer, and, in the context of the end of the world, it was thought to refer forwards to the heavenly city itself.

To many modern readers such a system seems like an exegetical free-for-all, but it is worth remembering that this was a very ancient system and was actually controlled by a rudimentary, if ultimately ineffective, system of checks and balances.⁸ Guibert himself

warns his readers to be very cautious about the use of allegory. It is an impressive art, he says, and the new preacher would be better to stick with the moral meaning of the text until he is better trained. Furthermore, the moral meaning has immediate 'cash value' in the daily lives of his hearers and is therefore to be preferred.

The Role of Experience

Guibert also discusses the role of personal experience when preparing to preach. Can the preacher speak about something which he has not experienced? He may, Guibert says, but the most effective preaching comes from something that we know to be true in our own lives. 'Any man, even one without experience, one who has never been part of a battle, can talk at great length about war, just because he has seen warriors or heard stories of war but what a difference there is between this and the man who can reminisce about war, who has fought or been besieged, who has gone to war and suffered!'⁹

The role of the inner man is crucial for understanding Guibert's view of preaching. The monastic contemplative life was right at the heart of his spirituality, and therefore the solitary monk wrestling with God and struggling with the sins of the flesh is the kind of experience out of which he envisages someone preaching. The transformation of the inner man of the hearer is also the mark of a good sermon. An effective sermon acts as a mirror, allowing the hearer to see himself as he really is. Guibert comments: 'It seems to me that no preaching is more efficacious than that which would help a man to know himself, that which brings out into the open all that is deep within him, in his innermost heart, that which will shame him, finally, by forcing him to stand clearly revealed before his own gaze.'¹⁰ The end of good preaching is self-knowledge that through seeing themselves as they really are, a hearer might be motivated to lead a more virtuous life.

Good Topics for Sermons

It is when it comes to finding material to speak about that Guibert most reflects his own personal struggles and the age in which he lived. He says that it is always useful to describe the pains of hell as this acts as a good incentive towards conversion. Lust and fornication also make good sermon topics. Combining the two is ideal. If people know the agonies they will suffer while they are planning to do something then they will be more likely to avoid lust and live virtuous lives. Motivating the listener to change is a vital ingredient in how to preach a good sermon. What use is it, Guibert asks, if people can identify virtue and vice and yet not have some motivation to change? What good is a soldier who is trained in the use of weapons if he has no will to drive back the enemy and see them defeated?

Conclusion

He ends with a summary. No-one ought to accuse Guibert of novelty in respect to his doctrine or theology. But he has got a few new things to say about preaching. So long as a preacher stays within the bounds of tradition and orthodoxy, he may avail himself of many new tools for effective teaching. **There are three main lessons here for us:**

First, Guibert's work is a helpful correction to the view that the medieval period was unrelentingly bleak in spiritual terms. Although it is true that he was a man of his time and was bound by the same limitations as his contemporaries, he also exhibits a surprisingly modern-sounding awareness of the audience in preaching and makes a genuinely pastoral attempt to instruct others in how to preach better.

Secondly, at a time when our culture is paper-thin and craves novelty we must remember the depth and richness of our spiritual roots. There is something humbling and wholesome about recognising that even ideas as in vogue as thinking about the audience in

Motivating the listener to change is a vital ingredient in how to preach a good sermon

communication did not arise with us, but were already being popularised by an obscure monk in the middle ages.

Thirdly, there is some really useful advice in Guibert's work. In our quest for technique in preaching it may be that the inner life of the preacher is a topic that we neglect at our peril. All of us would agree that a good sermon needs to be specific and focussed and not burdened by excessive material. Do any of us shy away from a commitment to preaching because we feel it has a bad reputation in the culture at large or because we are too lazy to do the hard work? Guibert's new tools for effective teaching still have much to say to us even although they are almost a thousand years old.

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Endnotes

¹ Guibert of Nogent lived in northern France from approximately 1055 until 1125. While a young monk at the monastery of Saint-Germer de Fly he was greatly influenced by Anselm of Bec and later became abbot of the Benedictine house at Nogent-sous-Coucy in 1104. His preaching manual is one of his earliest works. While it is true that many sermons survive from the patristic era, and there is a famous defence by Augustine of the Christian use of rhetoric, Guibert's work is unique for the way that it assumes orig-

inality on the part of the preacher and equips him with tools for constructing his own sermons rather than the common practice of reading from patristic homilies. His *Liber Quo Ordine Sermo Fieri Debeat* (A Book about the Way a Sermon Ought to be Given) can be found translated from the Latin in *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric*, ed. Joseph M. Miller, Michael H. Prosser, Thomas W. Benson, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973), 162-181.

² Guibert of Nogent, *Monodiae*, translated by Paul J. Archambault, *A Monk's Confession. The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*, (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), 62.

³ *Op. Cit.*, Miller, 168.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁷ *Op. Cit.*, Archambault, 60.

⁸ The primary two checks were example and reason: that is, the way that others, especially the Church Fathers, had interpreted the text, and the interpreter's own faculties of God-given critical and rational thought. However medieval churchmen had not seriously discounted the possibility that the Fathers might err or fully recognized the cultural limitations of their own conception of reason.

⁹ *Op. Cit.*, Miller, 175.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

The Wind of

A sermon by James S. Stewart

'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (John 3:8).

To anyone brought up in the Jewish tradition, it was natural, almost inevitable, to compare the Spirit of God with the wind. For in the Hebrew tongue the same term was used for both. The word *ruach* stood in fact for three things. It meant breath, that most impalpable part of existence, the breath of life. It meant also the desert wind, tearing violently across the land with primal energy and elemental force. And it meant the Spirit of God, the supernatural power that sweeps across the ages, and bursts into history, and takes possession of the lives of men.

Now here was Jesus with Nicodemus on the Mount of Olives. It was night, with the moon riding high above Jerusalem, and driven clouds scudding across the face of the moon. The wind blowing up from the valley was stirring the branches and rustling the leaves of the olive trees. Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus about the work of God in the soul and the new birth – how God could take a life that was conscious of

failure and emptiness and dissatisfaction and sin, and transform it and make it full and strong and vital and victorious. But Nicodemus was not understanding. He – a master in Israel, a theologian and an accredited leader – found this kind of talk beyond him. So Jesus took an illustration. And Jesus did not need to search far for his illustration that night. It was there, asking to be used. 'Listen to the wind, Nicodemus! Listen to the wind! You can hear its sound – the night is full of it, hark to it in the tops of the trees – but where it has come from and where it is going no man knows. Now, Nicodemus the Spirit of God is just like that – invisible yet unmistakable; impalpable yet full of power; able to do wonderful things for you if only you will stand in its path and turn your face to it and open your life to its influence. Just listen to the wind, Nicodemus! Listen to the wind!'

Now what is Jesus saying here to us? We will break this text up into its component parts, and see.

The wind bloweth

That bare, simple statement affirms *the ceaseless action of the Spirit*. This indeed is the basic fact of life. Never has there been a time, never a moment, when the Spirit of God has not been actively at work.

Look at the Bible. It is there on the first page. 'The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters': the Lord God brooding over the chaos that was to become a world. It is there on the last page. 'I am the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.' So from the beginning of days to the last syllable of recorded time, the wind blows – the Spirit of God is at work. 'Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?' cries a psalmist. 'I can ascend to heaven, and he is there. I can make my bed in hell, and he is there. I can take the wings of the morning or hide in midnight – but he is there.' God never lets go. If God did let go of this universe for an instant, if God withdrew the action of his Spirit, the whole complicated structure would disintegrate and fly apart like a shattered mirror into a million fragments. It is the Spirit who holds human life together. Never does he cease working. The wind blows.

Of course, the New Testament goes beyond this. The New Testament says that at one particular point of history there was a sudden new eruption of the Spirit into human life. Jesus, in whom the whole power of the divine Spirit had been focused, had died and risen from the dead in the mightiest of all the Spirit's mighty acts; and now, upon the Church that called him Lord,

the Spirit

there burst the mighty rushing wind of Pentecost. In other words, those men felt the sudden start and shock of being possessed by the identical power that had been in Jesus, and was now and for ever inseparable from Jesus. And still from that moment to this, 'the wind bloweth' – sometimes a gentle zephyr, sometimes a judgment hurricane, sometimes a quiet guiding voice in the hour of meditation, sometimes a fierce tornado casting down strongholds of the powers of darkness in the name of Christ – always the Spirit of God at work!

No doubt, there have been times when men have been heard lamenting that God had deserted his creation and left it to its own confused, corrupt devices; times when, in faith's eclipse, Elijah's scathing words about Baal seemed almost applicable to the Lord of heaven – 'Cry aloud, for he is a god: either he is musing, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.' 'God sits in heaven and does nothing,' grumbled Thomas Carlyle. And H. G. Wells in his last testament, which he called 'Mind at the end of its tether', declared man to be played out, the world jaded and devoid of recuperative power, and the only possible philosophy a stoical cynicism. Some of us may have felt like

that about our own lives occasionally. 'Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? My soul is at the end of its tether – I have nothing to show but the shabby rags and tatters of my mistakes. There is no rebirth nor refreshing anywhere for me.' Some are feeling like that about the Church: Where is the hope of revival now? But – listen to the wind, Nicodemus! Listen to the wind, Carlyle and Wells and all you pessimists and cynics! And O my defeated and discomfited soul, listen to the wind, the music of the dawn wind of Easter and Pentecost! Bless the Lord that through all the chaos of the world, through all the complexities of your own life, God's Spirit is for ever active. On that fact depend all our hope and expectation. In the blackest night, if you open the windows and listen, you will hear the wind, and know that God is stirring, never slumbering, never resting, never desisting from his work of providence and redemption; and his cosmic patience is the salvation of the world.

The wind bloweth where it listeth

If the first affirmation was the ceaseless action of the Spirit, this is *the sovereign freedom of the Spirit*. Just as it is impossible to control the wind or dictate to it its direction, so no man, no Church, can domesticate the Spirit of God or delimit his sphere of operation.

Men have always wanted to do that. They have drawn their rigid dividing-lines and said, 'Here is the area in which grace will be valid – in this church, this sect, this racial group, this method of evangelism, this pattern of mission, this old-time religion, this newest of new theologies. Outside this sphere, no salvation!'

This is the perennial temptation of institutional religion. In fact, it is the temptation of all our work for Christ: to imagine that our way of doing things in the Kingdom of Christ is the one and only way, and to be impatient of every other.

But God is for ever upsetting our neat logical schemes and discomfiting our tidy regulations. Watch how it happened in Jesus' day. Judaism said, 'We are the covenant people. We will have no truck with Gentiles and barbarians and lesser breeds without the law. No salvation outside Israel!' And

they stood there doggedly, and built high and strong their wall of partition. And then one day, out of the darkness of Mount Calvary, from the red dawn of an empty tomb, there arose a great wind of the Spirit that battered on that wall and levelled it to the dust. With a crash that startled the world the wall of exclusion went down like matchwood before the gale of Pentecost.

There are men working overtime to rebuild it today, with their policies of segregation and their monopolies of grace. Let them beware! The wall will go down again before the tornado of the truth of Christ, and it may bury beneath its ruins those who try to build it.

Always that elusive and intractable Spirit of God keeps embarrassing our preconceptions. For example: why should Rahab the harlot find a place in the great panorama of Hebrews 11 and in the ancestry of Jesus Christ? Surely, we protest, that line should have been preserved impeccable! Why should Christianity offer the world an image of God all mixed up with a carpenter's bench and a wayside gallows, this appallingly unphilosophical 'scandal of particularity'? Why should providence bypass Athens and Rome and Alexandria, and locate the Saviour of the world in the drab provincialism of Nazareth – 'can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' Or pass down the centuries. What a shameful thing, cried the prim sticklers for ecclesiastical etiquette of John Wesley's day; what an utterly disreputable thing, to cheapen religion by carrying it outside the church walls where it belonged, and defiling it in the common concourse of the streets! Rank heresy!

But that is God's way. 'The wind bloweth' – not where we timidly

suggest or dogmatically demand that it should, not where the most up-to-date computer decrees – 'where it listeth.' Try shutting the door against it, setting your shoulder to the door and barricading it – and it will break the door down: as on the day when they rolled a great massive stone against the mouth of a tomb in a garden, and sealed it fast, and said, 'That's Christ finished! This dead and defeated man will trouble us no more. Let him sleep behind the stone for ever!' Suddenly came the wind of heaven and burst the tomb, and Christ went conquering through the world.

Don't try to tame that intractable wind. No act of Convocation or Assembly can circumscribe it, no arrogant political dictator curb it, no rooted personal prejudice patronise it. It is master of the world.

And – don't you see? – this is the essential optimism of Christianity. Here in the Spirit of Christ is a force capable of bursting into the hardest paganism, discomfiting the most rigid dogmatism, electrifying the most suffocating ecclesiasticism.

This is the sovereign freedom of the Holy Spirit. There is no citadel of self and sin that is safe from him, no unbelieving cynic secure beyond his reach. There is no ironclad bastion of theological self-confidence that is immune, no impregnable agnosticism he cannot disturb into faith, no ancient ecclesiastical animosities he cannot reconcile. And blessed be his name, there is no winter death of the soul that he cannot quicken into a blossoming springtime of life, no dry bones he cannot vitalise into a marching army. This is the glory of Pentecost. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth.' Come, Holy Spirit, come!

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof

This is *the indisputable evidence of the Spirit*. When the wind is blowing, it makes its presence felt. You hear its sound. You do not need a lecture on the dynamics of atmospherics to tell you that something is going on. That is palpable, unmistakable.

So with the work of the Spirit. When the Spirit of God stirs up a church or an individual or a community, there are palpable evidences of his working. Even the unbeliever becomes aware that something is going on. He sees the effects. He hears its sound.

This indeed is what had brought Nicodemus to Jesus at the first. Nicodemus was not a disciple. He was a Pharisee. He belonged to a group that was naturally antipathetic to Jesus and biased against the gospel. But he was an honest man, who kept his ears open, and he had heard the wonderful things that were happening wherever Jesus went. That is written here into the story. 'Rabbi', he exclaims, 'no man could do these mighty works you do unless God were with him.' In other words, although Nicodemus knew little or nothing about the dynamics of the Messianic revival then stirring Palestine, at least he had heard its sound. He recognised the indisputable evidences. And it was that recognition which, leading him to seek an interview with Jesus, was the first step in his salvation.

Look at it again on the larger scale of the apostolic age. The hard supercilious pagan world of Greece and Rome professed itself indifferent to the gospel; but it could not deny that wherever Christ's men went strange things kept happening. The true life of those Christians was indeed, as Paul declared, a hidden life. 'Your life is hid with Christ in God.' But it was not all hidden. No! Unconcealed and open were the Christians' impact on society, their revolutionary ethic, their amazing courage amid the vicissitudes of life, their absolute serenity face to face with

Here in the Spirit of Christ is a force capable of bursting into the hardest paganism, discomfiting the most rigid dogmatism, electrifying the most suffocating ecclesiasticism

death. The world, says the Book of Acts, saw the evidences: it 'took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus'.

Always there are unmistakable signs when the power of the Spirit goes to work. 'Thou hearest the sound thereof.' When a man once weak and shifty and unreliable becomes strong and clean and victorious; when a church once stagnant and conventional and introverted throws off its dull tedium and catches fire and becomes alert and missionary-minded; when Christians of different denominations begin to realise there is far more in the risen Christ to unite them than there can be anywhere else in the world or in their own traditions to divide them; when religion, too long taboo in polite conversation, becomes a talking-point again; when decisions for Christ are seen worked out in family and business relationships; when mystic vision bears fruit in social passion – then indeed the world is made to know that something is happening. Something vital is going on. And it is not romanticising to say that we can thank God that all around us in these days the evidences are so indisputably clear. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof.' If you have heard that sound, as I hope you have, you can refute all the minimising and depreciating voices in your own heart and in the world around. It is the unanswerable argument for Christ.

**Thou hearest its sound,
but canst not tell
whence it cometh**

This is *the inscrutable origin of the Spirit*. We all feel a certain element of mystery even in the physical wind. We cannot tell across what immense tracts of land and ocean it has made its way, nor in what atmospheric upheavals it took its birth.

So with all great movements of the Spirit. Where have they sprung from? Can you track down the factors that brought them into being? The Church, the Body of Christ – did that

really begin as a committee meeting in Jerusalem, with Peter in the chair, appointing sub-committees to draw up a constitution? The conversion of Saul of Tarsus at the gates of Damascus – can that be represented, as some would have us believe, simply in terms of sunstroke or epilepsy or neurosis or brain-washing psychology? When Peter made his great confession of Messiahship, was Jesus just being mythical when he replied – 'Flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but My Father in heaven: it came to you out of eternity'? Where did the Wesleyan movement begin? Was it in the Rectory at Epworth? Or in the Holy Club at Oxford? Or in the meeting-house in Aldersgate Street in London? These are only very partial answers. Better say it began far back in the counsels of eternity. 'Thou canst not tell whence.'

But some do not like having to make that admission. Some want to eliminate the element of mystery and the dimension of transcendence. They would prefer to have the Father in heaven image replaced by a statement about human self-awareness. Perhaps Nicodemus himself had something of this temperament. He wanted everything explained. He was a theologian who came near losing the living God behind the abstractions of academic debate: not an unknown occurrence even today. 'How can a man be born again when he is old?' asked Nicodemus. 'Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb? Tell me precisely how this rebirth happens.' It was not that Nicodemus was insincere. He just wanted a rational explanation. Where did regeneration come from?

So we rationalise and psychologise and demythologise – until the Christian faith has ceased to be good news about a living personal God acting in history and has become merely something about man and his nature, his so-called authentic existence; until theology has lost itself in anthropology; until perhaps we reach the point of the self-confident journalist who wrote – 'We now know there is no such thing as the supernatural.' How astonishingly naive! How frightfully callow! As if there were nothing more in this world than our logic could measure or our intelligence explore! As if man's self-awareness were the soul and centre of the universe! Jesus here says to us, as he said to Nicodemus – Stop explaining, and worship! Stop arguing, and adore. What you have to do is not to tell whence the wind comes – that you will never know. What you have to do is to get your sails up to it, now that it is there: not elaborately to expound its mysterious dynamics, but gladly to yield to its living power. This is the one thing that matters. This is the appeal of Jesus, and this the challenge of Pentecost.

**Thou canst not tell
whence it cometh, and
whither it goeth**

This is *the incalculable destiny of the Spirit*. You cannot tell where he is liable to carry you.

The gale that blows across the earth in days of storm drives on into the unknown. And no man can tell where

The little group of men in the upper room at Pentecost did not know that the wind of the Spirit that was shaking them was going to carry them and their descendants to the presence of Caesar and the conquest of the world

the Spirit of God in Christian discipleship may lead him before his life on earth is done.

Here was Nicodemus. Nicodemus did not know that night that the wind of the Spirit was going to carry him one day – do you remember where? To Pontius Pilate's council chamber, to claim the body of Jesus – one of the boldest actions in the gospel story – and beyond that to the world-shattering event of the resurrection. The little group of men in the upper room at Pentecost did not know that the wind of the Spirit that was shaking them was going to carry them and their descendants to the presence of Caesar and the conquest of the world. The monk, Martin Luther, pondering the epistle to the Romans did not know that the wind of the Spirit stirring in his monastery cell was going to carry him to the revolutionising and remaking of the Church. And today, Christendom with two thousand years behind it does not know where the wind of the Spirit is going to carry it in the next two thousand or twenty thousand years – to what new strength of unity, what triumphs of mission, what redeeming impact on the total life of man. And for the individual – for each of us today – this incalculable destiny of the Spirit stretches out before us.

In some ways it is a daunting, even frightening thought. Perhaps some of us would think twice before praying for the gift of the Spirit if we knew where he was liable to lead us. The Spirit comes on a young man, a medical student who has just taken a brilliant University degree and seems all set to become in the course of the years a consultant at the top of his profession – the Spirit disrupts his plans for a career, and sends him out as a medical missionary to Africa on a miserable pittance. The Spirit comes on a girl immersed in the ordinary, innocent pleasures of life, and she begins to feel constrained to witness for Christ in shop or factory, University or social set. The Spirit comes upon a church, proud of its venerable past, justifying itself by its meritorious history, and compels

that church to take seriously the radical word of Jesus – 'He who saves his life shall lose it; and he who loses his life for My sake' – and that includes the church that is prepared to lose its life – 'shall find it.' It is a daunting thought, this incalculable destiny.

But it is thrilling too. For you see, it means you just cannot tell what God may yet make of your life and character. The one thing you must never say is – 'My course is fixed and set and circumscribed: no chance of anything fine or noble now for me!' Never – unless you are prepared to 'make God a liar' – never under any circumstances say that. It is so atrociously untrue. For Christ at Pentecost, and every day, is holding out marvellous prospects for everyone – all

is the accepted time. Listen to the wind, Nicodemus. Listen to the wind!

And so the shadows fall apart,
And so the west winds play;
And all the windows of my heart
I open to Thy day.

From a book of sermons published in 1968. James Stewart was Professor of New Testament at New College for twenty years and was Moderator of the General Assembly in 1963.

***The one thing you
must never say is –
'My course is fixed
and set and circumscribed:
no chance of
anything fine or noble
now for me!'***

the drabness and tedium vanquished, all the suffocating poisonous atmosphere of disillusionment gone with the wind of his refreshing grace. And this is not all. For beyond the hopes of earth gleams the incalculable destiny of the hereafter. 'Now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.'

If only we would take Christ at his word today! If only the Church, if each of us would allow the Holy Spirit to have his way with us! I know the difficulties. I know all too well the towering, formidable difficulties. But I also know that in the last resort it is as simple as this: will I take Jesus at his word? Now

Men of Devotion

Inspiration from the life and ministry of Robert Murray McCheyne

Robin Sydserff, The Proclamation Trust, London

As ministers of the gospel in this nation, **are we more devoted to the Lord's work than to the Lord?** This is a vital question that every generation of ministers must ask and answer with honesty before God. The church *urgently* needs vision, leadership, structures and strategies, but first and last it needs men of God, men of devotion. This essay reflects on the life and ministry of Robert Murray McCheyne, a man of God, whose motivation was an ardent devotion for his Lord, a love that consumed him, heart, soul, strength and mind.

McCheyne: his life and work (a brief summary)¹

Robert Murray McCheyne was born in Edinburgh on May 21, 1813. In the winter of 1831 he commenced his studies in divinity at Edinburgh University under Dr Chalmers and Dr Welsh. Following his studies, he was licensed as a preacher by the Annan Presbytery on 1 July 1835. The call to his own parish came a year later in 1836, with his ordination as minister of St Peter's Church of Scotland in Dundee. Fragile health led to frequent periods of absence from his congregation. During one such period in 1839, he wrote a series of ten pastoral letters,

warning and exhorting his folk to a depth of commitment to the Lord, that they might know the reviving work of the Spirit among them. In 1839, while McCheyne was travelling in Palestine as part of a Church of Scotland delegation to discern the state of the Jews, revival came to St Peter's, under the ministry of William Charles Burns, who deputed for McCheyne during his absence. In the months that followed, the movement spread and endured, evidencing a genuine period of spiritual renewal throughout Scotland. At the end of 1842, McCheyne prepared (initially for his own congregation) *Daily Bread*, a calendar for reading through the Psalms and New Testament twice, and the Old Testament once, in a calendar year.² In March of 1843, persisting in his pastoral visitation during an epidemic of typhus, Robert caught typhus fever and died, two months short of his thirtieth birthday and the disruption of the Church of Scotland. *The Memoirs and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne*, compiled by his close friend Andrew Bonar and first published in the year after McCheyne's death, provide an inspirational insight into his life, motivations and ministry.

McCheyne: man of God

These are the barest facts of his life and ministry, but what of the man, the man of God? He is remembered for the 'quality' of discipline that marked his devotional life, for his 'divine sensitivity', an awareness of eternal priorities. 'Live near to God,' he wrote, 'and so all things will appear to you little in comparison with eternal realities.'³ He was a man marked by humility, possessing a true understanding of self and of the Lord to whom his life and ministry pointed. He was a Godly man, marked by Christ-likeness – holiness. Isabella Dickson (who later became the wife of Andrew Bonar) wrote of McCheyne, 'There was something singularly attractive about Mr McCheyne's holiness. It was not his matter nor his manner that struck me; it was just the living epistle of Christ...'⁴ (It is interesting that she refers not to McCheyne but to *McCheyne's holiness*, seeing beyond the man to the man behind the man – Jesus Christ.) McCheyne's own words: 'I feel there are two things it is impossible to desire with sufficient ardour, – personal holiness, and the honour of Christ in the salvation of souls.'⁵ This passion for souls was evident in a life of fervent prayer for his people,

both for their salvation and spiritual growth. He exercised a dynamic preaching ministry, remembered by Andrew Bonar for its 'deep solemnity' and the 'intense eagerness' with which his people listened as the word was expounded.⁶ Above all, perhaps, McCheyne had a deep, realistic expectation and longing for revival. 'It is not our part to tell of coming judgements, of fire from heaven or fire from hell; but this we can plainly see, that *unless the Spirit of God shall come down* on our parishes... many souls that are now in the land of peace shall soon be in the world of tossing and anguish!'⁷

Admiration, inspiration or imitation?

I could spend the rest of this essay reflecting on the evidence and outworking of these spiritual qualities in McCheyne's life. We might be edified and even inspired, but would we be changed? Would this young man's testimony have any permanent transforming impact on our lives? That is the implicit danger in *reading* Christian biography, that we regard these 'saints' as elusive spiritual giants whose Christian experience is way beyond us. We find ourselves sharing the sentiments of one of McCheyne's contemporaries: '*I cannot understand McCheyne; grace seems so natural to him.*'⁸ But that will not do, for he is no more a saint than you or I. He is a sinner saved by grace, invested with an *identical capacity* for life and Godliness. Moreover, he was neither especially gifted nor experienced. Immediately then, his life is a challenge to us, for there is no biblical logic that constrains us from being like him.

If that is the danger in *reading* Christian biography, then the danger in *writing* Christian biography is a tendency to dwell on the 'marks' or the 'impact' of the Christian life, without getting at the root, the foundation, the ground of motivation. Unless we grasp what was the driving force in McCheyne's life, we are unlikely to shift from admiration to inspiration. For example, if we

aspire to imitate his personal holiness, our striving will be less fruitful than if we grasp (and pursue) what it was that motivated him to live like his Lord.

Having navigated clear of these potential dangers, **to allow his testimony to remain at the level of 'aura', is then simply a matter of personal choice, because the commitment is too great and the road too hard.**

The 'key' to his life and ministry: love for the Lord

What drove and motivated McCheyne, in the deepest sense, was not a desire to cultivate personal holiness or discipline in his devotional life, nor was it his passionate concern for souls, his love for his people, nor even his desire for revival. These are all secondary to his first passion, his first love – the Lord Jesus Christ. It was *his love for his Lord* that motivated McCheyne to live near the Lord, to be like the Lord, to be driven by the Lord's concerns. In other words, **his devotion to the Lord was the inspiration for his devotion to the work of the Lord.** The Revd James Hamilton said this of McCheyne, 'Love to Christ was the great secret of all his devotion and consistency... I question if the Church of Scotland has [ever] contained... such a constant flame of love and adoration toward Him that liveth and was dead.'⁹ Another contemporary of McCheyne commented, 'A striking characteristic of his piety was absorbing love to the Lord Jesus. This was his *ruling passion*.'¹⁰ The hymn, 'Jehovah Tsidkenu' ('The Lord our Righteousness'), which recalls his conversion, speaks volumes of his love for his Saviour.

My terrors all vanished before the sweet name;
My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free –
Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.¹¹

A common theme in his pastoral letters, particularly those in which he exhorts people to trust Christ, is a spontaneous outpouring of his *own* heart love for Jesus. He cannot help but make Jesus attractive! 'Has the Spirit opened a window into the heart of Jesus, and let you see the fountain-head of that love that "passeth knowledge"? Then you will be able to say, "To me *He is precious*."¹² Or, 'Let your soul be filled with a heart-ravishing sense of the sweetness and excellency of Christ and all that is in Him.'¹³ While we might not use the same poetic language, if we are what we purport to be – ministers of the gospel – then we must surely *feel* what he *felt*.

McCheyne's devotion to the Lord, as the foundation and motivation for life and ministry, is basic, biblical priority. Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment' (Mat. 22:37-8). 'Do you love me?' is the *basic* question of call and commission for Christian ministry (John 21:15-19).

The 'key' to the depth of his love: 'how much I owe'

Having established that love for the Lord is the 'key' to McCheyne's life and ministry (and ours), we must go further and allow McCheyne's testimony to ask a deeply searching question of our hearts. **Do we love the Lord with the same all-consuming devotion as he did? Why is such a depth of love elusive to us?** The title of L.J. Van Valen's excellent biography, *Constrained by His Love*, gets to the heart of it. McCheyne's deep love for the Lord was the response to his 'felt knowledge' of how deeply he was loved by the Lord. Throughout his life, he retained a constant consciousness of what he had been saved from and what it cost to save him.

The hymn, 'I am a debtor', written in 1837, expresses his heart-felt gratitude for the gospel grace that had saved him from eternal hell.

When I hear the wicked call
On the rocks and hills to fall,
When I see them start and shrink
On the fiery deluge brink,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know –
Not till then – *how much I owe*.¹⁴

His correspondence and sermons constantly bring the reader and hearer to the cross as the supreme display of the love of God in Christ. It was the paradox of the cross – where wrath meets mercy – that McCheyne so clearly grasped; a God *so holy* that He had to die for him, and yet a God *so loving* that He was glad to die for him. To return daily to the cross and grasp this truth will, like McCheyne, truly electrify and transform *our* hearts. Preaching on the cross, he spoke as follows, ‘*Divine holiness* shone through. What infinite hatred of sin was there when He thus offered Himself a sacrifice without spot unto God! ... *Divine love*; every drop of blood that fell came as a messenger of love from His heart... This was the love of God.’¹⁵ Elsewhere he wrote, ‘Surely they have but cold love to Jesus that do not burn with desire to see the fair brow that was crowned with thorns.’¹⁶

Once again, these sentiments are thoroughly biblical. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul prays that we might have power to grasp the limitless dimensions of Christ’s love, *in order* that we be mature in the faith, filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17b–19). McCheyne was such a man, one who had a genuine and deep experience of the love of Christ. Might we also be constrained by the love of God in Christ, constrained by love *to love* the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength!

Love’s motivation: the influence of McCheyne

‘The possession of grace,’ McCheyne wrote, ‘fills us with very different feelings from the possession of anything else... if you have tasted the grace of the gospel, the irresistible longing of your hearts will be, Oh that all the world

might taste its regenerating waters!’¹⁷ In the same letter, McCheyne speaks of the ‘devotedness of our all to Him.’ His love for the Lord motivated him to give his all for the Lord.

(i) Love for the Lord led him often to the Lord

McCheyne’s love for the Lord led him often into the presence of God. ‘A calm hour with God,’ he wrote, ‘is worth a whole lifetime with man.’¹⁸ Writing to William Burns, ‘Take heed to *thyself*. Your own soul is your first and greatest care. You know a sound body alone can work with power; much more a *healthy soul*... Keep up close communion with God.’¹⁹ Elsewhere he writes, ‘The only way to be kept from *falling* is to *grow*. If you stand still, you will fall... Seek to be made holier every day; pray, strive, wrestle for the Spirit, to make you like God. Be as much as you can with God.’²⁰ While McCheyne’s acute awareness of the necessity of the private life of prayer and Bible study for spiritual growth led him to cultivate rigorous devotional discipline in his life, it was also his greatest *pleasure* to spend time alone with God. Well could he echo the sentiment of the Psalmist, that he delighted in the law of the Lord and, *as a consequence of that love*, meditated upon it day and night (Ps.1:2). *We struggle* to find time in the day to be alone with God. McCheyne’s problem was wresting himself out of the private presence of God, to be about the Lord’s work! It is a matter of priorities. McCheyne’s workload matched (and probably exceeded) the busiest of our generation.

(ii) Love for the Lord gave him a passionate desire for likeness to the Lord

McCheyne’s love for the Lord motivated him to be like the one he loved. To speak of the pursuit of personal holiness in such terms, shatters any ‘aura’ of super-order Christian experience. It will not do to categorise such experience as exceptional. It is normal, habitual Christian living, the call to holiness that dominates so much of the

New Testament. ‘I trust,’ McCheyne writes (it is simply assumed), ‘you feel real desire after holiness. This is the truest mark of being born again.’²¹ McCheyne’s desire for personal holiness is a constant refrain throughout his life and ministry. ‘Seek advance of personal holiness... For this Jesus died, for this He chose you, for this He converted you, to make you holy men – living epistles of Christ...’²² Writing to a fellow minister, ‘Remember you are God’s sword, – His instrument, – I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is a mighty weapon in the hands of God.’²³ It is important to appreciate that McCheyne is not advocating Christian perfection. His desire was to attain ‘the most entire likeness to Christ in mind, will and heart, that is *possible* for a redeemed sinner to attain to in this world.’²⁴ This is not Christian perfection, but rather Christian maturity.

Why is the cultivation of personal holiness so important (a question all the more relevant in our day, since such an emphasis is at best marginal in the churches)? **Holiness is important because our usefulness is a consequence of our holiness.** Indeed, McCheyne argued that our *whole usefulness* depends on our holiness.²⁵ Scripture is clear. Paul’s portrait of the Christian minister in 2 Timothy 2 speaks of ‘an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, *useful to the Master* and prepared to do any good work’ (2 Tim. 2:21).

How then does holiness render us useful? Holiness authenticates ministry. The testimony of a friend speaking of McCheyne’s public praying, ‘Was it oratory? No. Was it very eloquent? No. Was it very beautiful? No. What then was it? Nothing whatever, but simply the truth. He was a man so completely imbued with the truth, that it came out when he spoke. This is the great truth... that God is holy...

You can see and feel, by the way he utters the word, that that man is a son of God.²⁶

To be holy is to possess a 'divine sensitivity', to be eternally driven in life, motivations and priorities. 'Make all your services tell for eternity,' McCheyne wrote; 'speak what you can look back upon with comfort when you must be silent.'²⁷ For the Christian minister, to be eternally driven is to pursue the salvation of souls and the sanctification of believers. It is to focus on the clear biblical priorities of preaching and prayer. It is to resist being tempted from the best by the good. Moreover, to possess 'divine sensitivity' is to be sensitive to the seriousness of sin, to the ever-present danger of the flesh. Writing to William Burns on the subject of personal holiness in ministers, 'Take heed, dear friend; do not think any sin trivial; remember it will have everlasting consequences.'²⁸ Andrew Bonar on McCheyne, 'to the very last, he was ever discovering and successfully resisting the deceitful tendencies of his own heart and a tempting devil.'²⁹

McCheyne's holiness gave him a true understanding of self and of the Lord. His life was marked by humility. Aware of his unworthiness and inadequacy for the appointed task, his ministry relied absolutely on the Lord's power, and pointed unequivocally to the Lord of power. 'Oh, cry for personal holiness... or all success in the ministry will only be to your everlasting confusion.'³⁰ When 'success' comes in ministry, holiness safeguards us against believing that it was down to us! Indeed, God *needs* our humility if he is to bring blessing, for he is jealous for all the glory.

As much as he was convicted of the *necessity* for personal holiness, it was also McCheyne's greatest desire to be like the One he loved. His language reveals the pleasure of his experience, 'I am persuaded that I shall attain the highest amount of *present happiness*... by attaining the most entire likeness to Christ in mind, will, and heart...'³¹ Elsewhere he writes, 'There is no joy like that of holiness.'³² We would do

well to encourage one another in this biblical truth, that true blessedness is found through holiness.

(iii) Love for the Lord motivated him as a preacher

McCheyne's love for the Lord was reflected in a dynamic preaching ministry; his personal desire for knowledge of Christ, a conviction he shared for his people. 'The grand work of the minister,' he wrote, 'in which he is to lay out his strength of body and mind is preaching. Weak and foolish as it may appear, this is the grand instrument which God has put into our hands, by which sinners are saved, saints fitted for glory... Oh! Brethren, this is our great work. It is well to visit the sick... to educate children and clothe the naked. It is well to attend presbyteries. It is well to write books or read them. But here is the main thing – *preach the Word*.'³³

His preaching was striking, both in content and manner. Its content was marked by an uncommon clarity and confidence in the Word. Reflecting his own vivid understanding of what he had been saved from and what it cost to save him, he preached to the fullest extent the holiness and judgement of God, and yet at the same time, the depth of love and mercy of God. **Thus, he did not so much preach grace, but create grace through his preaching, grace in all its fullness.** Moreover, he preached both to the converted and the unconverted *at the same time and from the same text*, such was his confidence in the dynamic power of the Word, to simultaneously convert and cultivate spiritual maturity. For McCheyne, the whole Word of God was gospel, and the gospel was the whole Word of God.

Equally, the manner of his preaching was marked: both 'direct' and 'affectionate'. Andrew Bonar described his preaching as a combination of 'affectionate appeals to the heart, and searching applications'.³⁴ His repeated warning to the unconverted of their perilous state under the judgement of God, calling them to repentance, was matched by the invitation of the gospel,

as he urged them to flee to Christ. To the converted, as much as he exposed the danger of backsliding, he inspired the pursuit of spiritual maturity.

(iv) Love for the Lord motivated him as a pastor

McCheyne's love for the Lord issued in a committed and passionate love for those whom God had charged to his care. Conscious of the value of his own soul in the sight of God, the state of the unconverted weighed heavily upon him. The series of pastoral letters to his congregation at St Peter's, written during a period of absence through illness, must have searched their hearts (as indeed they search ours as ministers!). 'My heart's desire and prayer for you every day is that you may be saved.'³⁵ Or, 'How many of you that have stood out against all the invitations of Christ, and all the warnings of God, shall I find departed, to give in your account before the throne!'³⁶ In the letter from which this particular quotation is taken, McCheyne reproaches both himself and the unconverted for their indifference to the gospel. 'I dared not tell you you were perishing – I dared not to show you plainly of the Saviour. How often I have sat at some of your tables, and my heart yearned for your souls. Yet a false shame kept me silent!' 'Be sure of this, that you will only have yourselves to blame if you awake in hell. You will not be able to plead God's secret decrees, nor the sins of your minister... you will be speechless.'³⁷ **The eternal destiny of every soul he encountered in his ministry was his urgent concern.**

McCheyne was equally committed to the spiritual growth and maturity of the converted folk in his congregation. He sought to foster commitment to the word of God through *Daily Bread*, his calendar for Bible reading. He invested in their personal discipleship through pastoral visitation and personal correspondence. 'I will never rest,' he writes, 'nor give God rest, till He make you a lamp that burneth – a city set upon a hill that cannot be hid.'³⁸ Or, 'it is the foremost desire of my heart that Christ may be glorified in you... that you may

be a happy and holy people, blessed and made a blessing.³⁹

(v) Love for the Lord made him zealous for revival

McCheyne's desire for revival was driven by a zealous commitment to magnify the cause of Christ. Driven by the purest of motives, his discontent with days of small things drove him to intercede for such blessing. 'Everything I meet with, and every day I study my Bible, makes me pray more that God would begin and carry on a deep, pure, widespread, and permanent work of God in Scotland.'⁴⁰ In an essay entitled, 'Why is God a Stranger in the Land?', he points to 'few conversions', 'much deadness among true Christians' and 'the boldness of sinners in sin' as reasons to think that God is a stranger. 'Should we not solemnly ask the question,' he writes, 'What are the reasons why God is such a stranger in this land?' Amongst ministers, there is much unfaithful preaching to the unconverted. 'All the words of men and angels cannot describe the dreadfulfulness of being Christless; and yet, it is to be feared, we do not speak to those who are so with anything like sufficient plainness, frequency, and urgency.' In Christian people, 'there seems little thirst for hearing the word of God'. In regard to prayer, 'there is much ploughing and much sowing, but very little harrowing in of the seed by prayer... It is to be feared that there is little intercession among Christians now... little union in prayer. Christians are ashamed to meet together in prayer.'⁴¹

God is a stranger in Scotland today. Should we not also solemnly ask why?

Men of devotion

McCheyne is often caricatured as a figure of nostalgic reflection or an elusive spiritual giant whose capacity for Christ-likeness is way beyond us. He is neither. Rather, he stands as our example and inspiration, for, like McCheyne, we are sinners saved by grace, invested with the same capacity

for life and godliness. Our church and nation desperately needs ministers of his calibre – men of God. The key to McCheyne's life and ministry was his love for the Lord, a deep, ardent devotion that rendered him useful to God. May his passion be our passion, his priorities ours, men of devotion first and last.

This material was first presented as a seminar at The Faith Mission Edinburgh Convention, 2005. I am grateful to a number of folk for their helpful comments and to Eleanor Dawson at The Proclamation Trust for preparing a transcript of that talk.

Endnotes

¹ The best 'material' on McCheyne is his own. *The Memoirs and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne* compiled by Andrew Bonar (published by Banner of Truth) contains a number of McCheyne's letters (including the pastoral letters to his congregation), sermons, various essays published during his lifetime and the original texts of his hymns (we would do well to recover some of the verses that contemporary compilers of hymnbooks omit!) Christian Focus publish some excellent collections of his sermons and other writings: *From the Preacher's Heart* (1993), *A Basket of Fragments* (1996), and *The Passionate Preacher* (1999). Of the numerous biographies of McCheyne, J.C. Smith, *Robert Murray McCheyne: A Good Minister of Jesus Christ* (Ambassador, 1998) and Alexander Smellie, *R.M. McCheyne: A Burning Light* (Christian Focus, 1995) are the best of the 'older group' (first published, respectively, in 1890 and 1913). Of the contemporary biographies, L.J. Van Valen, *Constrained by his Love: A New Biography on Robert Murray McCheyne* (Christian Focus, 2002) stands apart.

² Don Carson's *For the Love of God*, in two volumes (IVP, 1998 & 1999) provides excellent directed devotional material that follows McCheyne's

Daily Bread.

³ 'Letter to Mrs Thain', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.283.

⁴ Andrew Bonar, *Diary & Life* (Banner of Truth, 1960), p. 415 (quoted in John J. Murray, *Robert Murray McCheyne: The Making of a Man of God*, Evangelical Library Lecture 1993 [Focus Christian Ministries Trust]).

⁵ 'Letter to Rev. W.C. Burns', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.281.

⁶ Quoted in the Preface, *From the Preacher's Heart*, p.14.

⁷ 'Why is God a Stranger in the Land?' *Memoirs and Remains*, p.593 (my emphasis).

⁸ Quoted in Murray, *Robert Murray McCheyne: The Making of a Man of God*, p.7 (my emphasis).

⁹ Smellie, *R.M. McCheyne: A Burning Light*, p.222 (quoted in Murray, p.15).

¹⁰ 'Tribute from Mr. Hamilton', 1843, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.172 (my emphasis).

¹¹ This is verse 5 of the original text, *Memoirs and Remains*, pp.632-3.

¹² 'Letter to a soul seeking Jesus', 1841, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.300 (original emphasis).

¹³ 'Letter to Mr. George Shaw, Belfast', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.293.

¹⁴ This is verse 2 of the original text, *Memoirs and Remains*, pp.636-7 (my emphasis). This verse is usually omitted in modern hymnbooks!

¹⁵ Sermon XXIII, A Communion Sabbath in St. Peter's, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.472 (original emphasis).

¹⁶ Quoted in Murray, *Robert Murray McCheyne: The Making of a Man of God*, p.15.

¹⁷ 'Letter to Mr. George Shaw, Belfast', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.292.

¹⁸ 'First Pastoral Letter to the Flock of St. Peter's', 1839, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.218.

¹⁹ 'Letter to Rev. W.C. Burns', 1839, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.216.

²⁰ 'Seventh Pastoral Letter to the Flock of St. Peter's', 1839, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.244.

²¹ 'Letter to Miss A.S.L.', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.287.

²² 'Letter to a Society in Blairgowrie for Diffusing the Knowledge of the Truth',

1841, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.295.

²³ 'Letter to Rev. Dan Edwards', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.282.

²⁴ 'McCheyne on Personal Reformation', *Memoirs and Remains*, p.150 (my emphasis).

²⁵ David Yeaworth, Robert Murray McCheyne (unpublished thesis), p. 102 (quoted in Murray, *Robert Murray McCheyne: The Making of a Man of God*, p.17).

²⁶ 'Testimony of a Friend', 1860, *Memoirs and Remains*, pp.201-2.

²⁷ 'Letter to Rev. R. Macdonald', 1839, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.210.

²⁸ 'Letter to Rev. W.C. Burns', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.289.

²⁹ *Memoirs and Remains*, p.149.

³⁰ 'Letter to Rev. W.C. Burns', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.289 (my emphasis).

³¹ 'McCheyne on Personal Reformation', *Memoirs and Remains*, p.150 (my emphasis).

³² 'Letter to Mr. J.T. Just', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.270.

³³ Yeaworth, Robert Murray McCheyne, p. 193 (quoted in Murray, *Robert Murray McCheyne: The Making of a Man of God*, p.20).

³⁴ *Memoirs and Remains*, p.65.

³⁵ 'Ninth Pastoral Letter to the Flock of St. Peter's', 1839, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.250.

³⁶ 'Eighth Pastoral Letter to the Flock of St. Peter's', 1839, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.245.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.247 & 248.

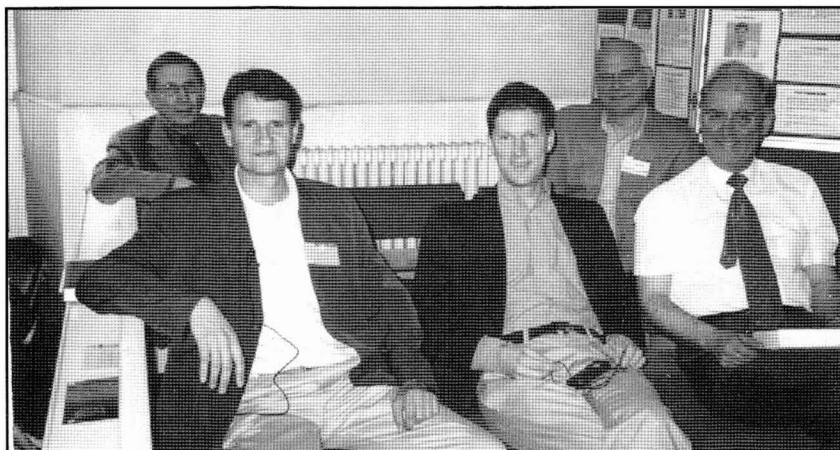
³⁸ 'First Pastoral Letter to the Flock of St. Peter's', 1839, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.220.

³⁹ 'Third Pastoral Letter to the Flock of St. Peter's', 1839, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.224.

⁴⁰ 'Letter to Rev. W.C. Burns', 1840, *Memoirs and Remains*, p.289.

⁴¹ 'Why is God a Stranger in the Land?', *Memoirs and Remains*, pp.590-2.

4TH SCOTTISH MINISTRY ASSEMBLY 12-14 JUNE 2005 ST GEORGE'S-TRON, GLASGOW



Left to right: Dick Lucas, Willie Philip, Vaughan Roberts, Tim Keller and Bob Fyall



Some of the many Irishmen who faithfully attend each conference



Future young ministers

Some of the delegates in the Tron before the start of a main session

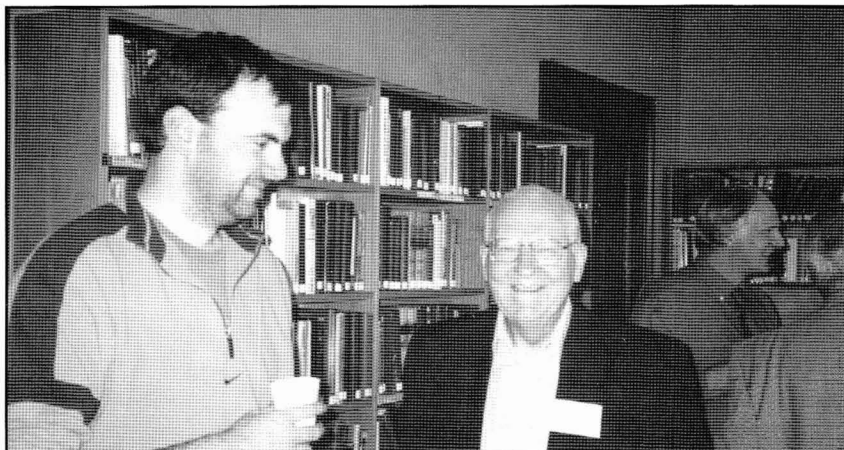


‘Growing the Church’

Over 300 ministers, church leaders and students from all over the UK and further afield, met for three days at this preaching conference in June. Main speakers were Tim Keller, Dick Lucas, Vaughan Roberts and Bob Fyall who in their various ways, each addressed the theme.



11TH EDINBURGH CONFERENCE IN CHRISTIAN DOGMATICS 29 AUGUST – 1 SEPTEMBER 2005



David Wright with one of the delegates

'The Doctrine of God'

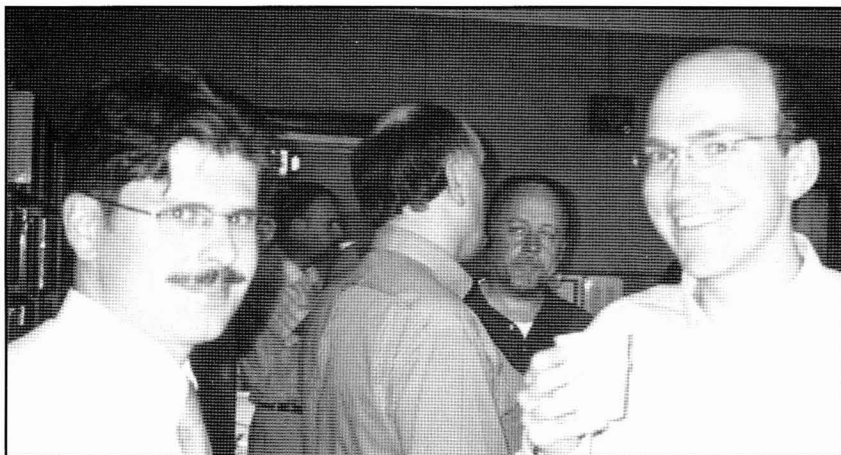
The opening sermon of this conference, entitled, 'The Lamb who was Slain', was preached by the Chairman of our Trustees, Prof. David Wright in Greenside Parish Church. The remainder of the conference, attended by almost 100 academics, was held in the Free Church College.

A distinguished and very able group of speakers gave addresses which were found to be stimulating and which led to good discussion.

It is hoped to publish the papers eventually.

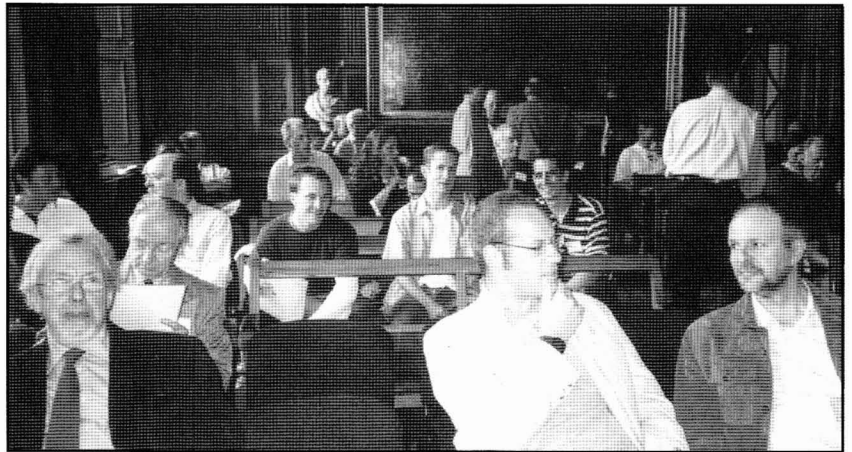


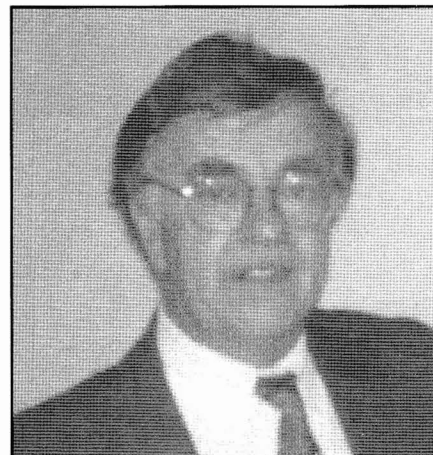
Bob Fyall and Peter Ackroyd



Peter Komlósi, our own resident student, with Andrew Sach

Some of the delegates and speakers relaxing between addresses. The Presbytery Hall of the Free Church College was a most fitting place to meet!





Ann Allen meets Douglas Kelly

When Douglas Kelly studied in Edinburgh for his Ph.D. he made a multitude of friends and forged strong links with the Gilcomston and Holyrood Churches and their ministers. These links have survived and strengthened over the years so it seemed ideal that I take the opportunity to talk with him for this journal during his current sabbatical in Scotland.

Ann: Douglas, tell me about your spiritual roots.

Douglas: I hail from Eastern North Carolina, originally a very heavily West Highland Scottish settlement. I was brought up the only child in a Christian family, and I assimilated faith almost with my mother's milk. There was a large extended family, conversation encompassed matters of the gospel. There was always prayer in the family. I describe myself as having been brought up on my knees, so to speak. I was surrounded by fine solid Christians who could give a clear testimony and an

intellectual defence of their faith. That wasn't unusual in those days. In that part of USA general society was conservative, evangelical even. Schools taught more or less the same as the church in those days, and almost everyone I came in contact with would have been Christian. I grew up knowing nothing but the Christian faith. However it was at a very early age that I appropriated the faith for myself, and as a child I always wanted to be at church and prayer meeting. It is difficult to go back in my own mind to specifics of childhood but by the age of seven, I would say, I had a call to be a minister of the gospel.

Ann: That calling and conviction never wavered, for you followed that through into adulthood?

Douglas: I loved languages so I began with the study of languages which I knew would be good preparation for a teaching ministry. I studied the classics, Latin and Greek, French, German and Gaelic... the last because of my affinity

with my forebears. Those academic years were spent at Chapelhill, North Carolina. Then I spent a year abroad at the University of Lyons in France to carry through with French Literature, History and Philosophy. On my return I went to Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, for my theological studies and there I had to do some fighting.

Ann: I take it that brain rather than brawn was involved in that fight?

Douglas: Yes, there were big intellectual battles. The seminary was a mixed bag, like New College here in Scotland. There were real liberals and so I had to think issues through to their roots, on hearing in class opinions and views that were opposed to my view of Christian faith. I was hugely helped in that by a minister, a very godly gifted man, kind of like an American William Still – Dr John Reid Miller, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi. While I was at seminary I had the privilege of serving as his assistant and

he was constantly feeding me books to read which helped me answer the questions raised by liberals at the seminary. It was of course excellent preparation for my future when I became a professor of theology because I had to read so widely and critique the liberal theology so thoroughly in order to pass well! It was a kind of double reading that was required. I read the required texts and then the reformed and evangelical texts which offered a rebuttal or different view.

Ann: Then it was New College, wasn't it – that was when our paths first crossed?

Douglas: Yes, Ph.D. studies at New College and while I was there no Scottish student wanted to take up the offer of the semester of studying at Tübingen in Germany so I asked the Faculty if I could go... and they answered that I was better than nobody and off I went to represent Scotland in Tübingen.

Ann: Armed with a Ph.D. you returned to the States and pastored a church, didn't you?

Douglas: Pastoring First Presbyterian Church in Dillon for eight years was a tremendous privilege and preparation for the task of teaching theology. There is no substitute for practical experience. That was followed by eleven years in Jackson Reformed Seminary, Mississippi. Then there was a desire to establish a further campus in Charlotte, North Carolina, my home state and I have been there since. My role here I see as preparing men for the ministry with the emphasis on expository preaching and prayer. I require in my classes the reading of William Still's *The Work of the Pastor* and also an article written by James Philip on expository preaching. I was brought up under expository preaching but my vision for ministry was honed and clarified by my experiences in Scotland under Mr Still and Mr Philip. Their influence profoundly shaped me and I have sought first in my own ministry in Dillon and then

in these 22 years of teaching to convey these principles. I don't teach *preaching*, I teach theology, but my goal in that is to prepare students who will emerge as faithful expository preachers.

Ann: Your ministry is extensive though, isn't it, stretching far beyond the bounds of North Carolina?

Douglas: Yes, I enjoy being used elsewhere. I travel frequently to Ukraine, eastern Europe, Brazil, Romania, and I regularly lecture to ministerial conferences in France. We have a lot of international students at Charlotte, and in all cases I am trying to give the greatest benefit to society; the preaching of the Word of God in holy lives and I have felt increasingly over the last ten years that the Lord is giving me some ministry in other countries, particularly in the two-thirds world, so that I can share my knowledge and conviction where there is great hunger for theological education.

In France there is a conservative seminary in Aix-en-Provence and every year there is a gathering of French-speaking evangelicals and I have given five series of lectures there over the past ten years. In Kiev they started a Protestant seminary which functions by meeting for two weeks at a time, three or four times a year. People have to keep their jobs and their ministries and so they come, some travelling nonstop for 36 hours to study for five days, eight hours of lectures daily. It's tough going for teachers and pupils but that seminary now has around 150 graduates!

Ann: That's thrilling when you think of the grip of communism being replaced by that kind of spiritual openness.

Douglas: Earlier this year there was the Orange revolution in Ukraine, and this seminary had a meeting of ministers and students to discuss the future of Christianity in Ukraine. They feel there is the beginning of an awakening

in their country – tremendous openness to the gospel. They had the new minister of religion for the Protestants visit them to speak, and he is one of the former students of the seminary. People of faith are being given positions of responsibility because of their uprightness and dependability. In a prayer meeting they were praying that any awakening would spread to Russia and then to western Europe.

Now I have previously thought that any hope of revival for the Anglicans would come out of Africa, but it may be that the spiritual hope for western Europe may be come from eastern Europe. I don't believe renewal will come from Britain or America.

Ann: You still do have the real hope that revival will come as it has in past generations?

Douglas: I definitely do. One of the reasons I believe that is the tremendous number of young people in other countries who are training for ministry. There just are not enough pulpits for them. Could it be that the Holy Spirit is calling these young people into ministry because in a handful of years there will be an outpouring of the Spirit and they will be there to teach those who will be converted. Now that is not concrete proof but it may be part of the divine plan.

Ann: One sign here of the dearth of the gospel, of course, is the lack of people coming forward to prepare for ministry.

Douglas: Absolutely. I would say that those students I have are just as committed as previous generations but they have a poorer classical education than previously. In America and I suspect here in Britain there is a general dumbing down of school and so students have perhaps more to catch up with. I have found students more eager to pray – many come to a time of prayer that I hold in the college weekly.

Ann: That's interesting, Doug, because here the media deliver a very jaundiced view of American Christianity. It would be fascinating to hear your views on church and politics there today. Now given that in a huge continent you have everything from 'warm fuzzy' religion to extreme right-wing Christianity, what is your take on the spiritual state of America just now?

Douglas: I think you have to divide the country. The southern states are a land apart. They have remained consciously conservative and very heavily church-going, maybe 70-80%. About 45% of the population attend church once a month and on any given Sunday approximately 33% of the populace are in church, so the churches are full. I read a sociological survey of the 1960s which said that church-going would steeply decline in the next 30 years. The same people followed up that survey in the 1990s and admitted they'd been wrong and that young people were just as committed to the church in this next generation. So that's the south.

Now if you take the eastern seaboard, New England liberalism and secularism are in control and church-going has declined hugely. The North West coast is arguably the most secularised part of the States. California is a mixed bag – some crazy things and some great evangelical churches. Mid West is somewhere in between. So the power of evangelicalism resides in the Southern states. You know they obviously tried to get out in the 1860s and that didn't work, so they have since felt themselves to be a culture apart, and part of that is strong education married to strong evangelicalism. You live in the south and then you go to the north or west of the States and it is at least as different as coming to Britain.

Ann: So politically does the Christian cohort of believers have more influence than their numbers merit?

Douglas: They do have an inordinate influence because the Roman Catholics and the conservative Mid-West vote alongside them. There is a sort of informal coalition across the country where they prevail in many elections on moral questions. I would say there were two things that brought evangelical conservatives out of the woodwork; the late Francis Schaeffer had a lot of influence in the late sixties. Until the 60s many conservative Christians did not vote. Two issues mobilised them – abortion and Christian schooling. There has been a sea change.

The first major change came with Reagan, and their votes have profoundly changed the political landscape. So Republicanism has become partnered with evangelical Christianity. You would have some Democrats who are devoutly Christian but less so than Republicans.

Ann: People here, particularly the secular media and press, generally rubbish the Christian influence because of its support for Bush who, of course, is ridiculed at every opportunity.

Douglas: Bush is portrayed as an unthinking bigot, and the Christian right as one of his main bases of power, is therefore considered as intolerant and narrow as he is. But from a historical perspective back in 1940-1960 when there was not the same evangelical influence in politics, there was a similar influence being exerted by the liberal church. Many were pro-Marxist or very left wing and concentrated on social action. Then came a transmutation – the liberal church receded and the conservatives began to speak to the issues. Then the former greying liberal leadership and the media cried 'Foul! You are mixing church and state. It has never been done before and this is a terrible right-wing plot to rob us of our hard won rights.' Of course it was not that at all. As to Mr Bush, I certainly think he is an evangelical Christian and he is much more intelligent than he appears. He cannot make a speech.

He mumbles and bumbles. He is bright and is not anything like as far right as the British media portrays him. If being anti-abortion places him in the right wing, then he is certainly that. He worships every Sunday in a Black Methodist Church which is conservative. Generally he is trying to appoint conservative judges who will have influence, and those to the far right are very dissatisfied with him, thinking he has not gone far enough. To reform the society in a profoundly Christian direction would take a massive shaking and he has in no sense done that.

Ann: Has the Iraq war alienated many of his supporters as we are led to believe?

Douglas: He had majority support despite many Christian people, myself included, disagreeing with him about taking us into the second war. People do not feel strongly enough to bring down the government as they did over Vietnam. They can't leave Iraq immediately without leaving a bloodbath but the policy will be reworked in the future.

Ann: Meanwhile, against that backdrop of all the turmoil in the States, you have come over here primarily to write. How strategic do you think Christian writing is these days, given the plethora of Christian books on our shelves?

Douglas: I feel that the church is in many ways in crisis with where our culture is, and there are issues that need to be addressed. You can't just take Warfield or Berkof and stick their answers into our culture. We need to deal with the problems in an intelligible way and let the people know that we are addressing the culture – everything from creation, intelligent design to ethics and, most of all, 'Who is God?' One thing I am trying to do in this book I am writing on systematic theology is that in every chapter I aim to have a section devoted to the developing world. Where Christianity is burgeoning in the world

is not in Britain or America, it is in Africa, South America and Asia. I go to these places and I have a great burden for them. So many people are being converted but if they are not taught they will have limited impact. So I am trying to aim at the questions raised in these cultures. In fact I have a section already written in the second chapter on 'Ancestors' which is of great interest to Christians in Africa and China. I am going to try to interact with some of their scholars. It would be interesting if a conservative wrote the first systematic theology which interacted with the Third World. That is my present desire.

Ann: What then should be our priorities in reading as Christians, given that the percentage of Christians now who read books other than the Bible is very small.

Douglas: Realistically people will read books on how to raise a difficult teenager or how to have a happy and fulfilled life – the *How To* books, of which there are so many.

Amongst all that, we need to have something of solidity that takes the Scriptures and applies them to people. Take John Calvin! I see Calvin primarily as a pastoral writer. He preached practically every day of his life and he was trying to take the Scriptures and apply them to the lives of the people of his day. The human mind is made to seek for order and meaning and a coherence in life and death issues. Even people guzzling in the pub wonder. I would desire to offer a systematic approach to make sense of the Scriptures and relate to life. I see so much of the church in crisis, questioning what will work. A lot of the stuff on worship indicates a panic that we are losing the culture. We can't let that drive the theology into crisis. There is in much of the evangelical church a crisis of confidence – people are asking, 'How are we to reach people?', 'Have we already lost them?', 'How well can we hold the membership?' So we have a bare minimum; we have got to do

better than that; I am trying to address that problem.

Of course we can change things but we can do that scripturally, using the language of today, using modern hymnology. We need to preach the Word in all its fulness. What worries me most about much of today's preaching is what I would term an *evacuation of transcendence*. We have become so user-friendly and horizontal, and we do need some of that, but too much and we have lost what people are desperately needing. People are looking for something God-centred, filled with the beauty of God, without in any sense being anachronistic. We preach in vain if we lose that sense of 'otherness'.

Ann: Some folk seek confidence in models like Willowcreek. What is your assessment of that phenomenon, Douglas?

Douglas: I am told that the megachurch syndrome may have peaked in the last five or six years and the basis of their constituency is now mostly folks over forty years old. Now there is nothing wrong with that. However many of their youth are going to episcopalian or more traditional churches. Yes, they have had a lot of success and yes, they preach the gospel but statistically they have yet to last a generation. So time will tell. Let's review when they begin discipling the next generation of believers who have grown up in their ministries. If you go very far from the main lines of Christian tradition then I fear it does not last.

Ann: So what about Scotland, Douglas? What are your observations on church life here?

Douglas: My wife Caroline thinks I have a dark view of life here. I live in Scotland for a year every six years. Each time I see that Scotland has become increasingly secularised. Churches are so much emptier. The Sabbath is gone and in my view society here is saturated with sexually explicit images. The acids of modernity which were so strong in

France, Sweden and Germany for a long time are doing their work here. I hate to say that because I feel that Scotland is my ancestral home.

Ann: In the light of that secularization, Douglas, what defence would you give for the central role of preaching in today's culture?

Doug: I would say, at the risk of harping on the one tune, 'Let's go to the Third World.' Now there is a lot of personal evangelism in these countries, it is true, but at the heart of everything is the anointed preaching of the Word of God. It may be pentecostal, it may be roman catholic, it may be presbyterian. Whenever you have burgeoning Christianity you have strong preaching. When God does something there is always a renewal of preaching. It was true when Celtic monks were going around, and then the face of northern Europe was changed by the preaching of the Reformation. When Holy Spirit revivals happened, strong preaching was central. So the proclamation of the Word of God, explaining who God is and what God has done, backed up by prayer is always the first means of grace and the most valuable thing in renewing a culture. I ask myself this question 'Aren't we so far gone either to three-minute soundbites or moving picture frames that this kind of preaching is not likely to work?' I firmly believe that the human mind hasn't changed that much. The philosophy of historicism is the theory that you cannot turn back the clock. That is a lie. What proof is there? Look at the Shah of Iran, a secular ruler. Who replaced him? Ayatollah Khomeini, and a country's ethos changed overnight. Any culture can turn from secular to Christian. At the heart is prayer, and with the Holy Spirit it could change any time. It was Mr Still who said it took 70 years of prayer and the suffering of the church to bring down communism. Maybe if the church took to its knees we could pray so that Muslims could be set free by the gospel. One thing we know – history is always changing. It may get

much worse but it could get much better. I think what will control the future is not the politicians we elect, though that process is important, but it will be controlled by a minority of the praying church. I believe that a praying, preaching, charitable church will control the future because God chooses the weak to confound the mighty so that God will get the glory.

Ann: Finally Douglas, your primary concern is to train ministers, so in your opinion what are the essential characteristics of great preaching?

Douglas: I always start with the life. I feel that we need men of godly lives and fervent Christian desire with hearts aflame for the Lord. Talent helps but there is no substitute for consecration and the conviction that eternity is real and that we are preparing men and women for eternity. If we are convinced of the Jesus of the Bible, of heaven and hell, of the nearness of eternity and of the gospel of reconciliation, and live as near to God as we can, then love will find a way to get through to the people. It goes back to the heart of the minister, I do believe. You can work out the mechanics of preaching to some degree, though I have never thought I was where I would have wanted to be as a preacher. Love will find a way – the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. You learn to preach through hearing good preachers, not by imitation, but by seeing how others communicate the love of God convincingly to others.

Ann: As Doug seeks to furnish our generation and those following us with tools for ministry through his writing, we pray God will use his great gifts to produce books which will better equip us and those who follow us to influence our culture for the Lord.

Evangelism – which way now? An evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, Cell church and other contemporary strategies for evangelism

Mike Booker and Mark Ireland
Church House Publishing, London,
2003. 207pp. £10.95
ISBN 0 7151 4008 6

Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, two men with wide experience of mission, have given us a very helpful exploration of mission resources available to local congregations. This is not, *per se*, a book to inspire people towards mission, but one that guides us through the plethora of options that are open to us. We are shown the strengths and weaknesses of each resource, given questions to ask before diving in and offered practical advice with further reading.

In addition to the resources mentioned in the sub-title, Booker and Ireland offer reflections on community ministry, children's evangelism and new forms of Church and Natural Church Development. They draw on experience from the world church and engage with the spiritual searching in the culture of our time. I run the risk of making the book sound like a *pot pourri* but the overarching theme that holds it together is the hope that what they write will enable congregations to evangelise effectively in their local situation – it is about bringing people to Christ and creating local Christian communities.

Take the very popular *Alpha* course as an example of the way they approach each resource. They examine *Alpha* in its wider context. The authors draw on research by Peter Brierly that suggests that congregations that run *Alpha* over a prolonged period tend not to decline. In running it for three years or more they are likely to be touching the lives of people beyond their congregation – *Alpha* is being used as envisaged, as an instrument of evangelism with people coming to faith. Booker and Ireland also explore why *Alpha* works effectively and suggest it is because it is process based, belonging comes before believing, it involves members as leaders and helpers and encourages people to

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tap into their networks of relationships to bring others to the course. It also has an easy-to-follow recipe that applies to more than the pasta!

However, the downside of *Alpha* is also explored. The lack of local contextualisation, the by now *passé* communication technology employed, serious questions about its theology and emphasis and the danger of oversimplifying the faith are among the criticisms made. They are not made with a view to denigrating *Alpha* but to improve it and make it more effective. We are all on the same side here.

In summing up the chapter, the authors invite us to ask the questions: Does *Alpha* fit the spirituality of our church? Are we willing to use the 'package' as it is, or do we want something more flexible? Are we willing to persevere with *Alpha* for several years? What happens after *Alpha*? They also advise that we ask around, read the books and go on an *Alpha* conference to get a real feel for the movement.

Many readers of this journal may be more attracted to *Christianity Explored*, which gets a very short review (49f.). However, many of the dynamics at work are the same as those in *Alpha* and, at the moment, *Alpha* is by far the more used course.

Evangelism – which way now? is a good place to start if you and your congregation are looking for a fresh way of sharing the gospel in your locality. It is full of information and wise comment. Not only could it save a lot of money by avoiding investing in a resource inappropriate for you – much more to the point, it could also introduce you to an effective local tool for sharing the Good News.

Jared Hay, Balerno

Worship – Reformed according to Scripture

Hughes Oliphant Old
Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville/London, 2002. 194pp. £14.99
ISBN 0 664 22579 9

It could be argued with some justifica-

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tion that Hughes Oliphant Old is the doyen of historians of worship in the Reformed tradition, having written a multi-volume history of preaching within worship that runs so far to five sizeable volumes. The book under review is at one and the same time more diffuse and more focussed than the larger project: more diffuse in that it covers eight particular practices within worship; more focussed in that it only considers material from the Reformation onwards. It is a slightly revised and expanded edition of a book first published in 1984. If you have the first edition I estimate that the benefits of buying this edition are marginal. If you don't, then few books will give you more help in understanding the roots and development of worship in the Reformed tradition than this one.

This is no racy read. Nor is it one of these all too common 'popular' books on worship that recycles so much material and teaches you nothing you didn't know already. It is solid and scholarly (but not incomprehensibly academic), and melds together the principles and practices of those whom we consider to be our 'forebears' within this particular tradition. Included in its ambit are chapters on Baptism, The Lord's Day, Praise, Preaching, Prayer, The Lord's Supper, Daily Prayer and Almsgiving.

Don't buy this book if you're looking for a quick fix on how to change what you do on Sunday mornings and other occasions of worship. Don't buy it if you are looking for a superficial answer to the question of the shape of worship in post-modern culture. But if you want to think afresh about the nature of worship, why our worship developed as it did and principles that could help us reform our worship in the present day, then this would be a good place to start. 'Tradition' is too often simply what we remember from our youth. Old shows us that tradition is wider and deeper than that and although we may not do things today in the way they did them centuries ago, the theology and principles that

undergird the Reformed tradition of worship challenge us to fresh expressions of worship for our time. Being faithful to the tradition is much more than simply doing the same things year after year. And 'its conviction [is] that worship must above all serve the praise of God' (p.176).

Jared Hay, Balerno

What could I do? – A handbook for facing hard choices

Peter Hicks

IVP, Leicester, 2003. 351pp. £9.95

ISBN 85111 299 4

This handbook of practical living by Peter Hicks, who is both a lecturer in philosophy and practical care at the London School of Theology, and pastor of a church, serves as a companion to his best selling *'What could I say?'* While the latter describes itself as for those who wish to help others sort out their problems, *'What could I do?'* is a handbook of pastoral advice for Christian decision making in hard, 'messy' and complex situations.

The book covers a variety of practical problems which Christians have to try to cope with, 55 in all, ranging from sex to technology, shopping, relaxation, parenting, or death itself. It is a source of refreshment for Christians having to face the nitty-gritty of living in the everyday world, and who have to contend with foul language, people they cannot get on with, as well as their own problems with alcohol, credit cards and mortgages. Hicks does not claim to have the last word on any of these, since each of them is dealt with in only two or three pages, albeit of concise and clear thinking, but he does try to get to the heart of the matter and apply appropriate biblical principles, with plenty of scriptural quotations in support. Earnest prayer in a right relationship with God, putting his will above all, is essential in approaching all these problems.

The material is both personally challenging and helpful, and also can be used as guidelines for talks.

'What could I say?' falls into two parts. The shorter, part 1 (37 pages), which

Hicks advises us to read first, sets out his own theology and philosophy of practical Christian living. Part 2 then addressed itself to these issues in alphabetical order. The book is concluded by five appendices – Twelve steps to coping with loneliness (Hicks likes 'steps' to resolving problems), Ten steps to changing thought patterns, Twelve steps to breaking free from sexual sin, as well as further advice on marriage, and remaining single.

The book is a must for all Christians living in postmodern and pluralistic society and is worthy of being as much a best seller as its companion *'What can I say?'*

Peter Cook, Alston, Cumbria.

Welcoming Asylum Seekers

Stephen Burns

Grove Ethics Series, Cambridge, 2004.

28pp. £2.75

ISBN 1 85174 560 2

Asylum seekers and refugees have never been far from the headlines over the past three to four years. While politicians and the media have used these newcomers as political footballs, numerous churches throughout the UK have been involved in welcoming them and helping them to settle in. *Welcoming Asylum Seekers* relates the experiences of one such church in Gateshead and in the words of the author, aims to 'celebrate properly what the presence of asylum seekers may come to mean'.

Both the strengths and weaknesses of this book lie in Stephen Burns' decision to concentrate on the experiences of this particular (Anglican) church. He details some of his encounters with individual asylum seekers, the preparations made by himself and his congregation for their arrival and some of the experiences of asylum seekers who came to live in Gateshead. This gives an insight into some of the joys and struggles of ensuring that the church offers a welcome to people who are often traumatised but made to feel unwelcome in their new country.

He also engages in some theological reflection which majors on Jesus' flight

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to Egypt as a baby. Unfortunately he concentrates as much on 'liturgical issues' as on the biblical material. The text also raises questions about how the author regards biblical inerrancy. Evangelism was not a priority for the church although some asylum seekers 'came to call themselves Christians'.

A booklet which starts out promisingly is ultimately a disappointment. It gives some insights into how a church with limited resources welcomed asylum seekers but leaves the reader feeling slightly dissatisfied and short-changed. In particular the theological reflections are limited and the low priority given to strategic decisions about evangelism is disappointing. The book presents the challenge for all churches to show the love of God to those who are marginalized by society, but in telling the story of one church's experience stops short of providing either a theological or practical framework for the wider church.

William Wilson, Glasgow

Why I am a Christian

John Stott

IVP, Leicester, 2003. 149pp. £7.99

ISBN 0 85111 407 5

In this book, John Stott, in seven brief chapters, sets out seven reasons why he is a Christian. He starts, perhaps unexpectedly, with God's grace – the fact that Christ 'pursued, pricked and prodded me until I surrendered to him'. The chapter is personal ('I have told you my story; I wonder about yours'), which sets the tone for the rest of the book. In the second and third chapters he explains that he is a Christian because Christianity makes sense of the claims of Christ, and in particular, makes sense of his death on the cross. In chapters 4 to 6, he explains that he is a Christian because Christianity makes sense of our humanness, because Jesus Christ is the key to freedom, and because all people 'have a number of basic aspirations or longings, which (I am persuaded) only Jesus Christ can fulfil'. In the seventh chapter, Stott expounds Christ's invi-

tation to the weary and burdened to come to him to receive rest (Matt. 11: 25–30), and speaks of the necessity of deciding how to respond to that invitation.

The book is vintage Stott – well argued, incisive, succinct. Its tone is irenic, and yet it is uncompromising and forthright. The issue of sin is not ducked. One of the most striking things about the book is the number of quotations – particularly from the mid and late 20th century. Malcolm Muggeridge seems to be quoted particularly frequently, but the range is wide and extends to Woody Allen and Richard Holloway. Quotations from and references to the Bible also pervade the book, and I found some of Stott's scriptural insights helpful. It is in evangelism, however, that this book will probably be found most useful – not just in giving pointers to Christians on how to speak evangelistically, but also the sort of book to give to people who are interested in Christianity.

What might the man in the street make of it? Well, I did pass it to a friend who does not attend church ('I consider myself to be a Christian, but not a very devout one') for his comments. He told me that although he hadn't expected to, he had enjoyed the book ('well explained, an easy read'). As a result of reading it, he says he plans to re-read the letters of Paul – and also to get his own copy of this book.

John Mann, Kinlochbervie

Is it I, Lord?

James O. Chatham

Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville/London, 2002. 107pp. £6.99

ISBN 0 6642 2672 8

This book is written for those seeking guidance in discerning God's call to be a pastor. It is broken down into fourteen short chapters considering various elements in hearing God's call to this vocation and what this call means.

How does God call us and how can we distinguish God's call from other 'calls' in our life? Chatham gives his own 'call' story and the 'call' stories of other people to show that there is a

variety of ways to hear God's call. Then chapters 3–10 are designed to challenge the reader about different elements of faith (e.g. God's presence, resurrection) and leadership (e.g. conviction, privilege of pastoral care) with each chapter concluding with statements similar to this: 'If this is you, then I suggest you consider whether God is calling you to be a pastor.'

Chapter 11 on Moses and his call is a very useful tool in the study of objections we have to God's call, and chapter 14 on 'Voices to Hear' states the basics in listening for God's call. Chapters 12 and 13 I found unhelpful – Chapter 13 is about seminary and Chapter 12 is a checklist mainly consisting of 'Do not become a pastor if...'. His checklist is harsh and I believe his book is unlikely to be read in the first place by those who have 'selfish' or 'manipulative' reasons for entering the ministry.

Chatham has been a pastor for 35 years and currently he is Pastor Emeritus of Highland Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. His book is clearly written, informative and accessible. The main drawback for this book is that it is American, with American images and metaphors. It does not (and cannot) reflect the variety and richness of ministry in a Scottish context. However I would recommend it to those exploring their sense of call if it were used alongside other resources.

Sarah Ross, Edinburgh

To Love and Serve – Being the Body of Christ in a Time of Change

Jonathan Draper

SPCK, London, 2003. 109pp. £8.99

ISBN 0 281 05540 8

In this brief and very readable book, Jonathan Draper (Canon Theologian of York Minster) explores what it means for the church to be the body of Christ in a context of change. Refreshingly, Draper opts not to recommend methods, structures or tools for ministry, instead focusing on what he refers to as 'the basics': attending to God; exploring our faith; growing into Christ; engaging with the world; and being the Body of Christ in the world.

Short chapters on each of these are followed by one longer one that seeks to put change into perspective.

Perhaps reflecting its origins in Lent addresses and small group discussions, the book is at its strongest in posing challenging questions and in making pithy assertions. These cover vital issues such as discipleship, prayer, unity, and the purpose of the church. Readers are unlikely, I suspect, to agree with all of Draper's positions, but will gain from engaging with his analyses and the desire to see a relevant and dynamic church that underpins them.

Despite these strengths, the book left me frustrated. Its brevity meant that repeatedly I found myself asking: 'Yes, but what does that really mean – and how?'; for example 'to create... godly human community for the whole world'. I was also troubled by the one-sidedness of some of the assertions. 'All of the great minds who have thought about God agree that human language is incapable of expressing anything true about God' seems both at odds with the views of the Jesus presented in the Gospels and also to overstate the argument more than a little.

Finally, I hugely welcomed Draper's corrective emphasis on loving service of, and engagement with, one another and the world. I wished, though, for this to be accompanied by a greater emphasis on the church having a message to proclaim (in deed and word) – that Jesus is Lord.

Nick Smith, Faringdon, Oxfordshire

Deuteronomy – Apollos OT Commentary Series

J.G. McConville

Apollos, Leicester, 2002. 544pp. £21.99

ISBN 0 85111 779 1

The short Introduction commences with Deuteronomy's name, place in the canon and distinctive features. A summary of its critical interpretation is followed by an outline of McConville's theologically conservative but 'fresh approach' to the book. While not defending Mosaic authorship (p.39), he does consider Deuteronomy (or a

form thereof) to be 'the document of a real political and religious constitution of Israel from the pre-monarchical period' (p. 34). After sections on its composition and reading, the Introduction concludes with brief remarks on the commentary's form and aims.

Within the Commentary proper, each passage from Deuteronomy is dealt with under five headings: Translation, Notes on the [transliterated] text, Form and Structure, Comment and Explanation. The approach taken is a final form one, with the text being subdivided on the basis of content, i.e. rather than on perceived literary sources. The very detailed Comments concentrate on understanding the biblical text, and the latter is often helpfully compared and/or contrasted with related passages not only in the book itself but also elsewhere in the Old Testament and occasionally Ancient Near East. In his grappling with the text McConville both makes extensive use of, and interacts with, other modern scholars, though always eirenically, and in the process comes up with many helpful exegetical insights as well as much suggestive reflection on the relationship between Deuteronomy and other parts of Scripture. Consequently, he does manage to achieve his stated aim of offering 'a theological interpretation of the text of Deuteronomy, in the context of the biblical canon' (p. 51). By contrast, the editors' claim that their authors also 'keep... one foot firmly planted in the universe of... the target audience' (p. 9), has not been realized, since the Explanation sections contain very little significant application to contemporary life or society. Nevertheless, McConville's detailed exegesis, the many proposed links to passages either illustrating or in some other way related to the texts under discussion, and his extensive theological reflection should make this an invaluable resource for anyone preaching from this vital Old Testament book.

Ian Wilson, Clare Hall, Cambridge

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The Shape of 'Sola Scriptura'

Keith A Mathison

Canon Press, P0 Box 8729, Moscow, Idaho 83843 www.canonpress.org
ISBN 1 885767 74 9

If you are concerned about the number of factions within the church and the increasing number of 'mavericks' that are appearing on the ecclesiastical scene, read this book.

If you are beginning to question your own confidence in the church, this book will help you get back to basics.

Essentially, this book is about the difference between Scripture *alone* and Scripture *only*. To quote from the Introduction: 'Within evangelicalism, many professing Christians use *sola Scriptura* to justify endless schism. Other professing evangelicals use the slogan *sola Scriptura* to justify every manner of false doctrine imaginable. The numerous ways in which *sola Scriptura* has been misused have provided its critics with further evidence of the "unworkability" of the doctrine.' The author's short answer is that *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) is not the same thing as *solo Scriptura* (Scripture only).

However, this book goes much deeper than that issue alone and explores the origins of church authority. Keith Mathison explores the origin of the Christian church and its allegiance to Scripture particularly in its connection with 'tradition'. He has discovered that that there were at least three concepts of tradition: Tradition 0, Tradition I and Tradition II.

Tradition I is the tradition which the early church believed and taught during the first three centuries. Calvin and Luther tried to turn the Roman Church back to Tradition I. This view is that Scripture is the sole and alone *source* of revelation. Scripture alone has authority. However, Scripture must be interpreted, and it is the church's role to interpret it according to the 'rule of faith' (*regula fidei*) and that 'rule of faith' is the apostolic faith – the faith handed down from the apostles. Paul warns the Thessalonians to withdraw from every

brother who does not walk 'according to the tradition which he received from us' (2 Thess. 3:6)

However, during the middle ages, a two-source theory of tradition began to emerge in the church. An extra-scriptural source – *the church!* The church was not only to be the interpreter but a *source* of revelation (Tradition II) also! The struggle during the 16th century was effectively between these two views of tradition.

To complicate issues, during the Reformation, at the other end of the spectrum, there were the radical reformers who believed that Scripture alone had authority but that the church did not have any right to interpret Scripture at all. In their view (Tradition 0) the church and the 'rule of faith' had no role whatsoever to play. Each individual was to interpret the Bible himself without any reference to the church, creeds or previous traditions. This view is effectively 'Scripture only' instead of 'Scripture alone'.

Mathison argues that many evangelicals today hold to this Tradition 0, and therefore the church is plagued with splits and factions and a glut of 'mavericks' and 'non-conformists' invade Christian thinking. He even shows that rationalists like Socinus (modern day Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, etc.) have arisen because of this '*solo Scriptura*' view and argues that the current emphasis on individual interpretation of Scripture is more akin to Enlightenment rationalism than Reformed Theology. Individuals are no more infallible than the Pope, and Tradition I guards against individuals and groups tearing Scripture out of its context and twisting its meaning.

To summarise, while Mathison is very strong on Scripture having final authority, his whole argument is that Creeds and Confessions have a role to play in the interpretation of Scripture. Church councils have a God-given authority, he argues because the Holy Spirit indwells the church. It is not possible to separate Scripture from creeds, churches and 'tradition', which

Mathison defines as Providence interpreted.

George I Macaskill, Stornoway

Let's Study I Corinthians

David Jackman

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2004.
306pp. £6.95

ISBN 0 85151 885 0

This is a book I am delighted to have on my book shelf and I'm sure you wouldn't regret buying it either. This edition in the *Let's Study* series is a gem. David Jackman is a name many will know and trust and he does not disappoint with this exposition of Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church. Jackman's style is very contemporary and his insightful exposition mixes seamlessly with penetrating application, which is one of the great attributes of this book.

The author ably deals with the controversial pastoral situations raised in the letter, grounding his comments both in the original context of the recipients and drawing parallels with the world and experience of the 21st century reader. One theme which recurs throughout this text is love, and Jackman draws our attention to the way this 'greatest of gifts' influences issues such as church discipline, the exercise of spiritual gifts and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and is not merely confined to the famous 13th chapter of Paul's letter.

The structure of this exposition is also of great help to the reader. Each of the 44 sections begin with a very short introduction; following the exposition there is a brief summary, which underlines issues related to the application of this text to our own lives and church situations. Whilst dealing with individual passages from the letter, the author does not lose the overview and context of the individual texts.

Personally, I consider Jackman's contribution to this series a highly accessible and useful tool for anyone undertaking serious devotional study of this biblical book, as well as a desirable resource for those preparing to share the message of 1 Corinthians with others.

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The study/discussion questions at the end of the book provide good material for home groups or Bible study groups. There is much in this book that will provoke and challenge the reader in terms of his or her own spiritual life – encouraging them, as Paul does the Corinthians, to 'grow up'!

Jane Howitt, Riga, Latvia

The Transforming Community – The Practice of the Gospel in Church Discipline

Mark Lauterbach

Christian Focus, Fearn, 2003. 243pp.
£5.99

ISBN 1 85792 875 X

For the Reformers church discipline rightly administered was a mark of the true church and necessary for the spiritual well being and growth of the Body of Christ. Always the question has been, however, 'How should discipline be administered?' Anyone acquainted with the Kirk Session Records and Books of Discipline of the Church of Scotland will say that they make sad reading. All too frequently discipline was administered in a harsh, unloving way which drove many to despair. As a result many today are tempted to fight shy of any discipline except in the direst circumstances.

In that context *The Transforming Community* is a most refreshing and challenging book. Mark Lauterbach is a firm believer in church discipline, but believes that it should always be done lovingly, although frankly and honestly. The aim must always be the spiritual restoration of the person at fault and if at all possible his or her rehabilitation within the work and ministry of the whole church.

Lauterbach, who writes from over twenty years experience, believes that discipline, in the first instance, should be carried through by the functioning body of believers. As members of the body of Christ we all carry a spiritual responsibility for our fellow members. When a person is at fault, therefore, it should be possible for a few friends

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lovingly to gather round that person, to point out the fault, and to support that person over a lengthy period in prayer and friendship. This can be done quietly and unobtrusively.

Where a fault is known and public, the author believes that there is need for open acknowledgement and confession. This must be done with sensitivity and love, but the author is fully persuaded of the need for open and public confession. He believes that this is vital for the spiritual welfare of both the offender and of the Body of Christ.

Because the aim is the spiritual restoration and rehabilitation of the offender, the author argues that it is vital for the appointment of a few people to surround the person with love and to support him or her with prayer, over a number of months. Lack of extended support and spiritual encouragement can have very negative results. Rehabilitation back into the work of the church, particularly if the person has been an office bearer, must be gradual. It cannot be immediate and automatic. The person, although forgiven, has got to regain the trust and confidence of the other members of the Body.

As we look at our own situation in the church today, I believe that this book has much to say to us. It will challenge us to think more deeply. I warmly commend it.

David W Torrance, North Berwick

Hope for the Church

Bob Jackson

Church House Publishing, London, 2002. 196pp. £10.95
ISBN 07151 5551 2

The Healthy Churches' Handbook

Robert Warren

Church House Publishing, London 2004. 168 pp. £10.95
ISBN 07151 40175

emergingchurch.intro

Michael Moynagh

Monarch Books, Oxford, 2004. 253pp.

£7.99

ISBN 1 85424 664 X

A common subject and authors from a similar background make it valuable to look at these three books together. All are concerned with the health/growth of the church at the local level, and are written by reflective Anglican practitioners and contain a helpful mixture of the theoretical and practical. That said, they approach the subject very differently.

Hope for the Church, is subtitled, 'contemporary strategies for growth'. Jackson's background was in economic statistics before entering the ministry. He begins by examining the wealth of detailed statistics the Anglican Church possesses. He concludes that these show that the Church of England is in decline and has been for almost 100 years. He states, 'One of the most serious impediments to growth in the Church is the Church's failure to look decline in the face and do something about it.' (p. 22) However, the same statistics also show that decline is neither irreversible nor inevitable. Surveys taken in 1989 and 1998 show that 20% of Anglican Churches grew in this period. Examination of the statistics suggests that there are things every church can do to stimulate growth. Essentially, the key is to focus on quality. As this happens, there is a corresponding growth in quantity. The evidence and arguments marshalled in this book suggest that even a modest amount of reform can plug the most obvious leaks and so achieve some surprising growth. 'There is still a growth dynamic in semi-traditional church so long as it is done well.' (p. 52)

The Healthy Churches Handbook is subtitled, 'a process for revitalizing your church'. Having been a parish minister, Warren has spent the last 10 years working as an Officer for Evangelism within the Church of England. This book is a collation of the material he has developed and used with many churches across England.

Warren believes seven things mark a healthy church. It is energized by faith, has an outward-looking focus, seeks

to find out what God wants, faces the cost of change and growth, operates as a community, makes room for all, does a few things and does them well. These seven reflect the values of Christ. There is an overlap here with the Natural Church Development material developed by Christian Schwarz. In acknowledging this, Warren suggests his marks focus on values, while Schwarz's focus on activities. The book gives a short explanation of each of the seven marks, with plenty of examples of how they take flesh in real churches. It explains in detail how the material could be used within a church. This process is likely to take 18 months to two years and all the worksheets required are printed in full in the appendices. As well as providing analytical tools for checking the health of a church, Warren offers a more intuitive/imaginative one, called the Angel of the Church, taken from the seven letters in Revelation 2, 3. In similar vein to Jackson, Warren is convinced that the key to growth is health. He finds that churches, which focus on being whole and healthy, are the ones which grow.

emergingchurch.intro explores fresh expressions of church, that is, things like café church and youth congregations which are springing up in many different places. Michael Moynagh teaches at St John's College in Nottingham and was in parish ministry before that. This book is 'for people who are aware that fresh expressions of church are in the air and want to know more, for those who understand the concept but want to tease out the implications and for those who want to get started'. (p. 7)

Moynagh recognises that there needs to be a mixed economy church. While inherited forms of church, if done better (see Jackson and Warren) will reach some, Moynagh believes that an increasing number of people will not be. So he argues 'that fresh expressions of church should be at the heart of mission in the West'. (p. 31) In support of this, he offers a theological basis, strategy for development and many snippets, drawn from his research into

real-life emerging church. He is at pains, however, to discourage mimicking. It does not offer models that can be replicated, but pleads for a change of mindset, particularly from 'come to us as we are' to 'we'll come to you where you are and in a way which makes sense to you'. Throughout, George Lings and Stuart Murray Williams, two of the other leading thinkers on emerging church in the UK, offer brief comments, which adds breadth and perspective.

Jackson offers theory for making existing church better, and this is based on solid statistical evidence. Warren offers theory and a proven practical tool for making existing church better. Moynagh offers theory and example for being church in a new way. Both approaches are needed, which means you need to buy at least two of them. Of the three, I found Moynagh's the least satisfying, yet it's probably the most important. It's very snippety, but it's breaking new ground, that no one else has yet written about so fully. Jackson is the most comprehensive, but perhaps the least transferable, tied as it is into Church of England statistics. I found Warren the most complete. Having read it, all the information and tools I need are there should I wish to put some of his ideas into practice. If I could only afford two, I'd buy Warren and Moynagh, but if I could only afford one, it would be Warren.

Neil Dougall, North Berwick

Firm Foundations – 150 examples of how to structure a sermon

Peter Grainger

Christian Focus, Fearn. 2003. 256pp.

£ 10.99

ISBN 1 85792 678 1

'How to' books are often produced 'for busy pastors'. This isn't one of them. The author has been a busy pastor – in the best sense! He spends anything from ten to twenty hours preparing a sermon, and has produced these sermon outlines from a background of twenty years' missionary service and seventeen years in the pastorate. He is Senior Pastor of Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh.

High commendation comes from his predecessor, Derek Prime, who says, 'It fills a definite gap in contemporary books on preaching.'

In a five-page foreword, Church Secretary Ian Balfour emphasises the key place that expository preaching has occupied throughout the history of the Chapel. Clearly, Peter Grainger has maintained this tradition, and adapted it to suit the trends of the current century. His deft introduction, 'Preparing to Preach' covers Choosing a Subject, Groundwork, Building Work, Application, and – interestingly – Computers, and reminds us that none of these without the inspiration and help of the Holy Spirit can produce an authentic message from God.

Fourteen chapters reveal outlines on a wide variety of biblical books, themes and characters from both testaments, and each sermon (and series) carries a title. For example, *Building on the Rock* – 31 studies in the Sermon on the Mount – has sermons entitled, 'The meaning of murder' (Matt. 5:21–26) and, 'An antidote to anxiety' (Matt. 6:25–34). Other series include, *God meant it for good* – 15 studies on the life of Joseph and *Songs for Pilgrims* – on Psalms 120–134.

Some longer books are treated selectively and evangelistically, such as John's Gospel, in 14 studies. Other studies, such as the 7 sermons on Acts 13–14 take a book's core chapters. Alternatively, a short book, Jonah, is given 14 sermons.

The author introduces each series, often explaining why he chose it for a particular stage in the congregation's life, and lists helpful books and commentaries. Application is found throughout, earthing the messages outlined in personal or collective experience.

The final chapter provides a complete sermon, 'Ephesus – First Love Forsaken', from the series: *A Spiritual Check-up* on Revelation Chs 1–3. In this way we see how a sermon skeleton is given flesh and muscle, but thankfully little or no fat.

Two questions arise:

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1. How useful are these outlines for preachers?

Old hands will find new insights into the passages chosen. New ones will discover how to break passages and sermons down into memorable phrases. In each case preachers will need to adapt the outlines to suit their individual approach. Slavish repetition is a 'no-no'!

2. How useful are they for congregations?

Estimating the length of the sermon on the church at Ephesus to be around 4,500 words (and depending on delivery speed, around 30 minutes), congregations used to 30–40 minute expository sermons will have no problem. Those used to shorter sermons will have. (So will the preacher!) Again, adaptation is the key.

These outlines were originally printed and handed to people as they entered the church. The author admits to a drawback: folk could see what was coming. With the advent of PowerPoint this can be avoided. (If you're lo-tech, you could always hand them to people as they leave the church).

In the early 19th century, Charles Simeon's published sermon skeletons, *Horae Homileticae* sought to teach fledgling preachers to expound the Scriptures. This shorter work does the same. Simeon's work filled 21 volumes – readers of this work, hungry for more of the same, can access the website listed!

It is a timely and stimulating work. It 'does exactly what it says on the tin' and provides a balanced diet. Compliments to the chef! Run out and buy it now, but 'Handle with Care'!

Michael J Lind, Campbeltown

Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ's Continuing Incarnation

Gerrit Scott Dawson

T&T Clark, London, 2004. 255pp.

£12.99

ISBN 0 567 08221 0

Following a famine, recent years have seen several books dealing with the ascension of our Lord. The latest,

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Gerrit Scott Dawson's work, is sufficiently scholarly to satisfy those who are looking for that level of understanding and sufficiently warm to stimulate worship and praise. Indeed, the author concludes by outlining various programmes he has used to teach the meaning and significance of our Lord's ascension, or continuing incarnation in heaven, and outlines several forms of morning and evening prayer using relevant Scriptures.

Dawson's emphasis can be stated simply. The Son of God, in becoming incarnate, became what we are and has never given up his humanity. He has, in fact, taken that humanity into heaven. Such continuing incarnation, entered into by his ascension, enables him to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit by whom we are united with him and share in his incarnate life in the heavenly places. 'The continuing work of the ascended Jesus is to maintain through himself in the power of the Spirit the wonderful exchange, whereby what is ours becomes his and is cleansed and what is his, even his prayers, becomes ours by grace.' Dawson insists on the finished nature of Christ's work on the cross but stresses that Christ completed that atonement by his triumphant entry to the Holy of Holies by his ascension. The ascension marks the commencement of his heavenly intercession for us. As Christians we are travelling to heaven which has been opened up for us in our humanity by our Lord's bodily ascension. As citizens of heaven we live in detachment to this world. Yet during that journey we continue to regard the world with the care and compassion of an ascended Saviour who continues to share our humanity. Dawson, throughout, stresses that the key to Christian living, worship, evangelism, social concern and ultimate hope lies in the continuing heavenly incarnation of our Lord.

To the author the ascension is fundamental to the Christian life and the hope which sustains it. Our Lord's continuing ministry at the Father's side

cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the significance of the ascension. Dawson's book is warmly commended.

James Taylor, Alva

Jesus According to Scripture

Darrell L. Bock

Baker Academic/Apollos, Grand Rapids/Leicester, 2002. 704pp. £28.99

ISBN 0 85111 288 9

Darrell Bock is well known for his work on the Gospels, particularly Luke's Gospel, and here he draws together the fruit of many years of study to produce a book that is aimed primarily at students and pastors. It is a large and intimidating-looking book in appearance, but the appearance is deceptive. The language is not especially difficult and, while based on his own scholarly work, it is a distillation of research for a wider readership. Bock's basic aim is to discover what the Gospels, individually and collectively, tell us about Jesus, and so there is no attempt to engage with 'historical Jesus' research.

The book is divided into four unequal parts. Part 1 introduces us to each of the Gospels with an overview of their structure and a flavour of their major themes. Given the size of the book as a whole, this part was shorter than expected and would have benefited from being more expansive. By far the longest section is Part 2, which is a detailed look at the life and teaching of Jesus according to the Synoptics. Bock divides the text into units and provides a table identifying the passages in each Gospel to which the units refer. Where a unit is to be found in more than one Gospel (as is often the case) the texts are dealt with collectively but some attention is given to differences between the Gospels. This approach cuts down overlap, but the downside is that it is more difficult to get the feel of the emphases of each Gospel. The ten chapters broadly cover the life of our Lord in chronological order.

Part 3, on John's Gospel, has a greater sense of coherence to it. Its three chapters deal with John 1 as an introduction

to the whole followed by the traditional Book of Signs/Book of Glory division. Again, the text is marked out in units for comment. The final part is a synthesis of the major themes of Jesus' teaching found across the Gospels.

As one would expect from such a scholar, there is much good material here from which a lot of insight will be gained that could feed into essays or preaching. I confess that I struggled with the genre of the book. I felt that it simultaneously tries to do too much and too little: it seeks to comment on every unit, but is not expansive enough to be a commentary; it seeks to guide us theologically on all the major themes, but admits that it would take another book to do so properly. Other readers may find the structure more beneficial and those that do will find the material instructive.

Jared Hay, Balerno

Evangelism in a Spiritual Age – communicating faith in a changing culture

Steve Croft et al.

Church House Publishing, London, 2005. 162pp. £11.99

ISBN 0 7151 4054 X

This book has grown out of concern about how to reach those who are interested in faith and spirituality and yet are outside the range of usual church activities. The first part describes research into some of the changes taking place in the spirituality of people beyond the church, carried out in Coventry Diocese in July 2003. In a very challenging and moving chapter, Yvonne Richmond, a priest and evangelist, tells how some of her long-held views about reaching people and sharing faith were challenged and reshaped by her coming across a number of folk open to hearing the gospel based on experiences and encounters that they were going through. Research followed, and Nick Spencer of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity analyses the results in chapters 2 and 3.

In Part 2 four authors respond to the research and the issues raised. Anne Richards offers 'Reflections'; Mark

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Ireland writes on how the local church can engage with those interested in spirituality but who have been put off religion; Rob Frost writes on 'Evangelism Beyond the Fringes'; and Steve Croft seeks to pull various threads together in a chapter on 'Transforming Evangelism'.

'Clearly many people are asking serious questions but there is a significant mismatch between those questions and the kind of answers the church is perceived to be offering', says Steve Croft in the preface. This is the book's starting point – both anecdotal stories and the fruits of research are then produced to back this up. This first part of the book is the stronger. The big questions that people researched wanted answered are great gospel opportunities, and Nick Spencer follows Yvonne Richmond's more pastoral account with a very helpful description and analysis of the 'Beyond the Fringe' research project.

The responses in Part 2 are more uneven. Anne Richards' reflections failed to add much to what had already been set out in Part 1, but Mark Ireland's very practical outline of how local churches might respond and what possibilities were emerging was very helpful, provocative and encouraging. Rob Frost's piece was all over the place, lacking enough information on some of the ideas he was talking about and lacking the quality of argument needed to back up what he was suggesting. Steve Croft is more successful in wrestling with what the research material means for the evangelistic task. The conclusion is stark; 'The cultural gaps are too wide to be crossed. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the traditional church itself to adapt and change its own culture to be acceptable to those beyond its reach.' (p.146). Yet there are plenty of instances of hope and opportunity cited in the book. A postscript is followed by a very helpful appendix on resources and organisations.

This is the third volume in the 'Explorations' series, following Bob

Jackson's brilliant *Hope for the Church* and Booker and Ireland's very helpful *Evangelism – which way now?* The realistic, faithful and open spirit in which the interface of church and culture is being looked at in these volumes is to be recommended.

Gordon Palmer, East Kilbride

New Testament Theology – many witnesses, one gospel

I. Howard Marshall

IVP/Apollos, Illinois/ Leicester, 2004. 765pp. £24.99

ISBN 1 84474 047 1

'This surely is the *magnum opus* of our generation' quotes this leading New Testament scholar. He gives a thorough, steady and masterful survey of the diversity of the New Testament writings and the theology which emerges from them set against the background of the forward missional movement of the fledgling Christian church. In the diversity of the many New Testament witnesses, Marshall, with scholarly vigour, shows their essential unity in the one gospel.

His aim is to let each of the New Testament books speak for themselves, so after an introductory chapter, in which he defends the need to do NT theology, he proceeds through each of the books with helpful summative chapters on each of the major sections i.e. synoptics, Paul, John, etc.

His mode of approach to the books is first a summary of the background and any critical issues of the authorship, date, destination, etc. then he proceeds to the text by tracing the 'theological story'. Then, having seen the emerging theology from the text and its story, he identifies and develops the theological themes. For instance, in Galatians, theological themes include: Salvation History and the Gospel; Justification; The Cross and its effects; The Spirit, etc. A pithy conclusion and suggested further reading round off each of the chapters.

The scope of the study is both wide-ranging yet painstakingly detailed. Marshall engages with all the issues in his usual helpful way, setting out the

possibilities and deciding on the most evidentially reliable option.

I particularly found him clear, cogent and helpful in his treatment of covenantal Nomism, the 'New Perspective on Paul'. His critique was masterful – Marshall at his best.

There is the drawback of the book-by-book approach that, for anyone wanting to follow the development of a theological theme through the NT, will require frequent trips to the indexes, which are, by the way, helpful, running to thirty plus pages.

The book is targeted at a student, possibly undergraduate level, and as such is a worthy successor of the likes of Donald Guthrie and George E. Ladd's *Theologies of the New Testament*. However, I constantly found myself thinking as I read it that there is so much help and inspiration for preachers and housegroup/Bible class leaders here. I could see this becoming, for me, the book I turn to, between reading the text and delving into the commentaries in sermon preparation. The book is well produced by IVP – clear print, not overloaded with footnotes, helpful indexes of authors, subjects and Scripture.

All in all a magnificent work of the New Testament scholar's art which enables us to appreciate the diversity, unity and missionary origin of the New Testament writings.

Jim Reid, Kinghorn